



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Workplace Relations

SPEECH

Monday, 20 March 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 20 March 2017 Page 2488 Questioner Speaker Littleproud, David, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof No Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr LITTLEPROUD (Maranoa) (17:23): As a former small business owner myself in the retail space, I can assure you governments do not create jobs; employers do. Our job as a government is to establish the right framework and environment to allow people to build their own lives and forge their own paths. As a matter of fact, in my regional, rural and remote electorate of Maranoa, an electorate encompassing more than 42 per cent of Queensland, many small shops, pharmacies, takeaways and hotels have simply found it too expensive to open on Sundays.

The Fair Work Commission is an independent arbitrator. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition himself set up the rules for the Fair Work Commission's inquiry and review into modern awards every four years, and he even appointed the independent umpire to make the decisions. This was not some fly-by-night inquiry either. In more than two years, the Fair Work Commission pored over more than 5,900 submissions and interviewed 143 witnesses to reach its position. It balanced the views between unions, employer organisations and many experts when it came to reviewing the modern awards for retail, hospitality, fast food and pharmacy. Of course, this decision only affects employees not covered by an enterprise bargaining agreement. The reality is that employers whose employees are covered by EBAs negotiated between unions and employer representatives have been benefitting from these EBAs, while small business has been slugged with higher wages.

It really does surprise me that the opposition leader refused to now accept the Fair Work Commission's pragmatism and common sense in deliberating over extensive sources evidenced—instead, seeking to play all sorts of games to contradict his previous commitments. True to form, the opposition leader has reneged on his promise to respect the decision. That is because it is politically convenient for him to do so. He lacks the courage and conviction. Sadly, like the ACTU's new secretary, Sally McManus, he thinks politically convenient subjectivity should be a key ingredient of good governance in this country. Forget democracy, forget the separation of powers on which our system of government relies. I think there would be complete and utter anarchy across this country if the goalposts were allowed to mean different things to different people.

Leaving aside the opposition leader's complete and utter hypocrisy, I will explain why this is a great thing for the people in my electorate—not only for the business owners but also for the employed and unemployed people living in regional and rural communities, in particular, who feel the effects of unemployment. The review of the penalty rates has, effectively, handed businesses the opportunity to extend their trading hours and bolster services to the local communities they support. For a lot of regional, rural and remote towns, Sunday looks like an old western ghost town. That is not to say that residents and travellers alike do not have a demand for the local cafe or pub on a Sunday. It is just that the burden of wages, coupled with unpredictable customer numbers, means that opening on a Sunday is a risk they need not take.

On this point I would like to home in on, specifically, tourism. Last year's Tourism Australia reports revealed the increasing number of tourists to my part of the world, outback Queensland. These tourist numbers comprised interstate and international tourists. Tourism has found a big economic pillar for Maranoa, through the drought, and I believe this decision will keep people coming to the country towns for years to come. If they have a newsagency, a cafe, local shops and a pub to stop at, they will get a real sense of our community spirit.

I call on the opposition to respect their promises and look toward the opportunities small business can provide one and all.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.