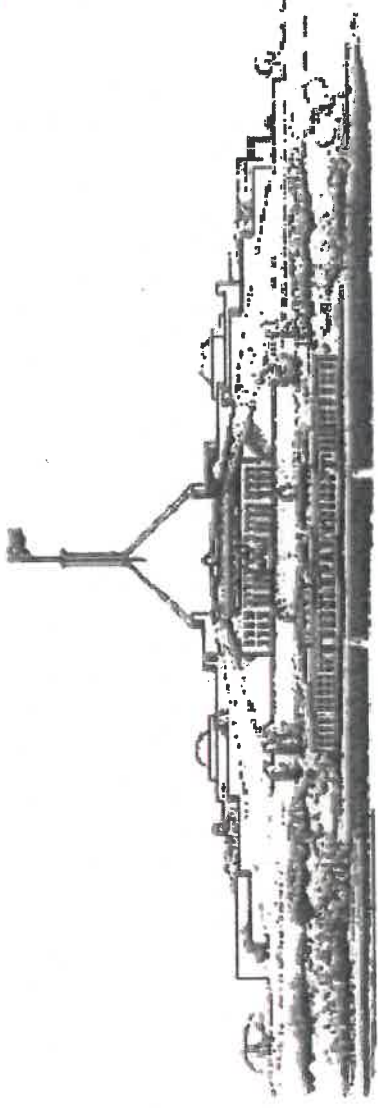


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COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Climate Change

SPEECH

Monday, 21 November 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

If there is not enough empirical evidence there or in the 4,000 papers that were reviewed in the study that I mentioned earlier, the problem is not with the evidence. The thing is that there is a climate conspiracy—but it is not a conspiracy by the tens of thousands of scientists who have contributed to our current understanding of climate change; it is a conspiracy by climate denialists to muddy the waters of what is now a very clear scientific consensus. Back in 1995, a Republican strategist, Frank Luntz, was encouraging Republican members to 'challenge the science' by 'recruiting experts who are sympathetic to your view'. Ten years later, he was still at it, with a 2001 memo that said: 'The scientific debate is closing against us but not yet closed. There is still a window of opportunity to challenge the science. You need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue in the debate.' That was the strategy. Well, he was not the only one to adopt that strategy, and the flood of misinformation has not abated. International organisations like the Heartland Institute actively sow uncertainty about climate change.

We should not allow the debate about climate change in this country to be derailed by misinformation the way that it has been in the United States and elsewhere. We are lucky in this country to have the leaders of both major parties in agreement that climate change is real. The difference, of course, is that the Prime Minister seems unwilling to actually do anything about it. But, for Labor, it is a critical issue and one that we are proud to take a stand on. The policies we took to the last election constitute a real response to climate change. We committed to 50 per cent renewables by 2030 and to funding agencies like ARENA and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation to get there. We committed to having a plan—a real plan—to support workers, businesses and communities who will bear the brunt of change. There is no doubt that change has costs. Our responsibility is to make sure that those people who bear those costs are not left unsupported and that there is a real plan for their communities and their jobs. We committed to bringing in a domestic emissions trading scheme that will bring Australia in line with our international obligations and drive the long-term transition that our economy needs, because there are opportunities—huge economic opportunities—for a country that makes this transition.

Those opportunities lie in building the technical expertise and the manufacturing capability to build the technologies of the future that will assist not just Australia to decarbonise but in fact the globe. Sadly, that is an opportunity that we seem unable to grasp under this government, because we know that through the hostility to renewables and through the vacillation around climate change policy we have seen a fall in investment in renewable energy in this country. We have seen this country decline in the international rankings as a place that is attractive for people who are seeking to invest in renewable technologies. And it is a great shame, because our researchers, our excellent technologists, have actually led the debate, led the research, yet so many of them have been forced offshore, forced overseas, because they have found that their skills, their knowledge and their vision are not welcome here and are not supported by conservative governments.

This is a huge opportunity for Australia to build an economy that is resilient and sustainable for us. It is an opportunity to build an energy system that is resilient and sustainable. But most of all it is an opportunity to leave an environment for our children that matches the one we have enjoyed, and other senators have spoken about this. But I want my kids to be able to play outside in summer, and should I ever have grandchildren I would like them to be able to do that. I would like to take them to the reef. I would like them to see the wetlands of Kakadu. I would like to take them to the alpine areas to see the animals and plants that live there now because of the unique climate that is there but will not be there under a warming scenario. These are all legacies I would like to leave for my children, and we have the opportunity to leave them. But it takes Australian political leadership to do so. *(Time expired)*

CHAMBER