

PRESS CONFERENCE - MOCCA CHILDCARE CENTRE, CANBERRA**TRANSCRIPT***09 Feb 2023**Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Member for Canberra**Cheaper Child Care; Productivity Commission Inquiry; Housing affordability; May Budget; Australian shipment of coal to China; US shooting down of balloon; Voice to Parliament referendum; MH17 Investigation; Surveillance cameras.**E&OE*

ALICIA PAYNE, MEMBER FOR CANBERRA: Good morning. I'm Alicia Payne, the Federal Member for Canberra and it's my great pleasure this morning to be here at MOCCA in Manuka with the Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, the Minister for Education, Jason Clare, and the Minister for Early Childhood, Anne Aly. And I want to say a huge thank you to Kara and the team here at MOCCA for welcoming us again to their beautiful centre, and to the children who we had such a lovely play with Lego this morning. I'm so proud that our government is a government that values early childhood education and care. And from 1 July this year, over one million families will benefit from our Cheaper Child Care policy. This is good for families, and you'll have more young children gain access to the great benefits of early childhood education and care. And that more parents can better balance work and parenting - particularly women. Because for too long the high costs of child care have put a brake on their economic participation. I know this is a huge issue for families in Canberra where we have some of the highest child care costs in the country. So I'm really pleased to hand over to the Prime Minister now to talk further.

ANTHONY ALBANESE, PRIME MINISTER: Thanks very much, Alicia. And it's great to be back here at one of the centres where we came in opposition, to talk about what a difference a change of government would make in taking child care seriously and in promoting early learning. Early learning is good for young ones, it's also good for families, it's also good for our economy. Because if we support women to be able to participate fully in the workforce there will be productivity benefits. It benefits them and their family budgets, but it also benefits businesses who employ women, because they're able to have greater continuity in their career. They retire with higher savings than they would otherwise, and it changes the dynamic in our workplaces. This was the first major commitment that I gave in my first budget reply, in the days when opposition leaders had policies and that made announcements in budget replies. We campaigned for three years with this as the largest on-budget investment that we are making during this term, and it's the largest on-budget investment because there is nothing that is more important than giving the

best chance in life for our youngest Australians, some of whom we've met here today. Learning that social interaction that's so important, as well as learning skills that will give them a good run up to when they start school. But also it's so important for our national economy. It's one of the themes as well of the Jobs and Skills Summit, and I'm very pleased that we put in place the mechanisms last year, in our first term we carried the legislation for cheaper child care that will benefit 1.2 million Australian families from July 1, but we're not resting there. We also committed to do a Productivity Commission Inquiry into the universal provision of early learning. Just as Labor is the party of universal Medicare, of universal superannuation, we also want to be the party that delivers universal, affordable child care - very important going forward. And that's why today we're announcing the Productivity Commission Inquiry with Professor Deborah Brennan as the person to undertake that enquiry. There's no one more qualified than Professor Brennan to undertake this work. It will be a comprehensive inquiry that will report back to the government on the next steps that we will make. I lead an orderly government. A government that indicates what we are going to do and then gets on and does it. Making a difference as we have in our first eight months, this will make a difference and it's my great pleasure to ask the Professor to make some comments.

PROFESSOR DEBORAH BRENNAN: Thanks, Prime Minister. I'm Deb Brennan, I'm from the University of New South Wales and I've been around the early childhood education and care policy world for a very long time. So I'm absolutely thrilled to have this opportunity to participate in a co-leadership role in the Productivity Commission Inquiry. We've got the foundations of a fantastic early childhood learning and care system in Australia. But everybody knows there's work to do. We've got challenges around affordability, access, workforce, many areas, so we're going to have a really good look at the sector and come up with some suggestions for advancing the system so that every child in Australia gets access to high quality learning and care.

JASON CLARE, MINISTER FOR EDUCATION: This is really important. The first five years of your life are everything. Everything you see, everything you hear, every book you read, and every person you meet shapes the person that you become. What happens in places like this shape the person you become. Early education is good for kids, it's good for parents, and it's good for the economy. We promised to do three things in the election; first, to cut the cost of child care, and that starts on the first of July. The legislation we passed last year will cut the cost of child care for more than a million Australian families. We also promised an ACCC inquiry into the driving costs behind child care. That work is now underway and they will provide their interim report in June and their final report in December. And thirdly, we promised a big and broad, far-reaching inquiry into our early education system to set us up for the next decade and beyond done by the Productivity Commission. And I've got to say, I am so glad that Deborah, you have agreed to do this work for us. Last night I picked up the

phone and spoke to leaders in the sector to tell them that Professor Deborah Brennan would be doing this work. And I've got to tell you, the response was overwhelming. If you talk to the same people I spoke to last night, you will hear the same thing. Because honestly, there is no one more experienced and no one more respected by the early education sector to do this work. Deborah, I know this has been your life's work and I thank you so much for helping us to write the next chapter.

ANNE ALY, MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: This Productivity Commission Review that's going to be led by Professor Brennan, who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to this review is just one part of the Albanese Government's reforms in early childhood education and care. We've started that with making early childhood education and care more affordable for 1.2 million families right across Australia. As Jason mentioned, and as the Prime Minister mentioned, those first five years are critical, and we have the capacity through early childhood education and care to change the trajectory of a child's life. No child born into any form of disadvantage, no matter who they are, no matter where they live, no matter what background they come from. Every single child has the capacity to grow and develop if we focus, if we get it right in those first five years. And this Productivity Commission Review led by Professor Brennan is going to be a huge part of our reforms in early childhood education and care, carrying on the Labor government's legacy in this area. It was a Labor government that first introduced the National Quality Framework when we were last in government, and we will continue that legacy because we know just how important those first five years are in a child's life. But also how important good quality, affordable early childhood education and care are for the economy, for parents, for allowing women who are predominantly primary caregivers to get out there, to work, to choose to continue their education and develop themselves if they so wish. So like Jason, and like the Prime Minister, and Alicia Payne, I'm really, really excited to welcome Professor Brennan to the Productivity Commission Review. Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER: As you can see, we're very excited about Professor Brennan's appointment here this morning. Happy to take questions.

JOURNALIST: On housing affordability, there's new legislation being introduced today. Obviously, that's a long term plan, but will there be any relief for renters in the May Budget?

PRIME MINISTER: We'll have the May Budget in May, but we're already taking significant action when it comes to housing, including the introduction of the legislation that we'll have today for the Housing Australia Future Fund. That's important legislation, to boost the supply of housing but particularly social and community housing. In addition to that, we've said that of those 30,000 additional social housing units that will be created, 4,000 of them will be set

aside for women and children escaping domestic violence. In addition to that, we have our Emergency Housing Fund, a \$100 million increase. In addition to that, we have our National Housing Accord with the Master Builders Association, with state and territory governments, with the private sector, working together with the private sector to boost housing supply. In addition to that, we're creating our Housing Supply and Affordability Council again. Working with state and territory governments, as well as local government about freeing up land, about creating more support there in the housing sector. In addition to that, there was over half a billion dollars just sitting there not being used for housing that we have tapped into to provide that support. So we have a comprehensive plan when it comes to housing, you'll see more roll out, in an orderly way, just like we're rolling out today's announcement in an orderly way.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, the first Australian shipment of coal has arrived in China, do you know how many more are expected to arrive in the near future, and are you confident that the shipments can increase with Don Farrell visiting in the near future as well?

PRIME MINISTER: What I'm confident of is that the dynamic between Australia and China has changed, from one where there wasn't dialogue between ministers, to one where there is. And that dialogue is always a good idea. I've said with regards to the relationship with China, that we will cooperate where we can, we will disagree where we must, and we'll engage in our national interest. And when I met with President Xi, I indicated to him publicly, but also of course, privately, that it quite clearly was in Australia's interests to export more to China. China currently receives more exports by value than the next three major trading partners combined. So that relationship is important for Australian jobs, for our national economy, but there's another thing it's good for too. It's good for China to receive those goods, because we have not just resources, but we have wine, meat, barley, seafood - the best in the world. And it is in China's interest for any impediments to be removed. I'm very pleased that Don Farrell had a constructive meeting this week with his counterpart in China. I'm pleased that Penny Wong visited Beijing on December 21st to mark the 50th anniversary of relations between Australia and the People's Republic of China. And I look forward to both of our countries going forward in a constructive, cooperative way. These reports haven't been confirmed yet. We are cautious about making announcements before they're confirmed. But quite clearly, I think if Australian business and Australian industry, what they tell me, including last night with business people I've met with, is that they are very pleased with the constructive direction of the relationship.

JOURNALIST: Further on China, US officials say that Chinese spy balloons are part of an effort to assess the military capabilities around the world. Does that concern you and does this incident in the US, do you see that as a setback in

the engagement that was seen between Washington and Beijing and Canada?

PRIME MINISTER: We support the sovereignty of nations, including the United States, our great friends in the United States. We consider all of the matters relating to national security and respond in an appropriate way and will continue to do so.

JOURNALIST: Disability workers and age care workers got big pay rises recently. The Childcare Workers Union has called for a 25% pay rise. We know pay is a huge factor in this industry. Would you back a pay rise like that for childcare workers?

PRIME MINISTER: The government doesn't determine the level of wages for everybody in the sector.

JOURNALIST: But do you support their push?

PRIME MINISTER: What I support is people being paid fairly, and I won't comment on specifics because that's the job of the Fair Work Commission to consider these matters independently of government and come to decisions. What I would say though, and what I've said publicly a number of times, including yesterday at the UN International Women's Day event that was held yesterday morning, is that if you look at the sectors where people are underpaid, they have something in common, two things: One, they are the very sectors that got us through the pandemic. Our cleaners, our aged care workers, our childcare workers. There's something else they've got in common as well. They are largely feminised industries, and that's why, when we made changes to industrial regulations, I announced at our campaign launch in Perth last year that we would very specially have measures that allowed the gender pay gap to be considered. We had legislation yesterday as well about transparency, so that the gender pay gap can be identified for larger companies as well. So I will conclude with this by saying, early learning educators do a fantastic job. They're valued by parents, they're valued by children who grow to love them and have a relationship with them. This isn't just a normal job, as much as I love all the journalists here, our relationship is different. Between the educators and the children who they look after. And I have every respect for the educators and the work that they do.

JOURNALIST: One on the Referendum Machinery Act please if I could. Yesterday, Katy Gallagher said that you would go ahead with the information pamphlet. In December, Don Farrell and Mark Dreyfus said "there's no longer any need for taxpayers to pay for a pamphlet to be sent to every household. The Referendum Act does not reflect modern delivery and communications methods." Do you still agree with that? Has your view changed or is this bringing back the pamphlet a concession to just get it through the Parliament?

PRIME MINISTER: Both things are right. The truth is, I don't know about you Josh, when was the last letter you sent?

JOURNALIST: I think it was around Christmas.

PRIME MINISTER: Apart from Christmas Cards, when was the last letter you sent?

JOURNALIST: You're testing my memory, it's not my press conference.

PRIME MINISTER: Has anyone here sent a letter this year?

JOURNALIST: Last week, to the US Consulate.

PRIME MINISTER: That's not a letter, that's an application. The world has changed how we communicate. But I could have said, we will engage constructively. One of the Senators approached, we made this decision a week ago, one of the Senators approached and said, this will make a big difference for our approach. I don't know how many times I can say this at press conferences, we will do what we need to do to broaden support for this. The referendum that will be held later this year is about two things, recognition and consultation. Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in our Constitution and consulting them on matters that affect them, that's what it's about. Now we want to maximise support for that. So if anyone has, as I said, I await any member of the House of Representatives or the Senate to examine the question and the draft changes that I put forward at Garma last year. Now, I'll give you the exclusive, just for you, so if everyone else can not listen, if there's a constructive suggestion, that's backed in by lawyers, we'll change that. If there's a suggestion, there hasn't been one, there hasn't been one. I want this to succeed. I'm not being dogmatic about this. This is not our proposal, this is a proposal that came from the bottom up. And you need to think of the counterfactual of what happens if this referendum succeeds. If this referendum succeeds, Indigenous Australians will be shown the respect that they deserve. Australians will all know that we've acknowledged the great privilege that we have of sharing this continent with the oldest continuous culture on earth. And the world will see that Australia's a mature country, a mature country that can be honest about our history and can celebrate that history. That's what this is about. It's not about party politics. And that's what every state Premier and Chief Minister understands. And I just say to my colleagues on the Hill, this isn't the opportunity to look for division. This is the opportunity to look for national unity, to embrace the opportunity which is there. So, if someone has a suggestion, by all means put it forward. I'm up for it, in terms of, whether a pamphlet goes out, it doesn't hurt, a pamphlet going out. People are going to put things in letterboxes anyway during the referendum. If people want taxpayers to pay for it, there's a judgement call there, fine. Taxpayers shouldn't be funding the campaigns of Yes and No. That should be up to people to fund. There should be equal funding and there will be under the under the proposal that we have. I also welcome Simon Birmingham's comments this morning. Simon Birmingham has said very clearly

that there shouldn't be funding of the Yes and No case. I welcome the comments of Simon Birmingham. I welcome anyone who wants to join this journey on the path to reconciliation.

JOURNALIST: There are strong indications that Vladimir Putin signed off on the supply of weapons used to shoot down MH17. If you could look at him in the eye today, what would you say to Vladimir Putin?

PRIME MINISTER: I'd say that you are reprehensible. That Vladimir Putin, clearly, the shooting down of MH17 was an act of terrorism that had an impact here in Australia, but on many countries as well. And we will continue to pursue these issues with every avenue at our disposal.

JOURNALIST: So how do you feel about the suspension of the criminal investigation into the downing of MH17?

PRIME MINISTER: I think I just answered how I feel about it. The issue, of course, of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this is a guy who runs an authoritarian regime that doesn't care about human rights, that doesn't care about devastation of communities, whether it be in Ukraine, whether it be the oppression of its own citizens, or whether the acts outside of Russia of which we've seen a number. The travesty of MH17 is an issue in which he should be held to account and Australia will continue to pursue all of these issues with every avenue at our disposal.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, this morning the Deputy PM has indicated he wants to get rid of Chinese linked surveillance cameras from government buildings. We spoke about the relationship with China earlier, the last time the Australian government tried to ban or exclude a Chinese company from communications in any form in Australia, it was detrimental to our relationship with China. Are you concerned about how Beijing will react to the removal of those devices?

PRIME MINISTER: No, we act in accordance with Australia's national interest. We do so transparently and that's what we'll continue to do. Thanks very much.

PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA

