

Tabled at Budget
Estimates, 22/5/06
by Minister for
Env &
Heritage



Leader of the Opposition

31 August 2004

Mr. D. Leyonhjelm
Chairman
The Shooters Party
PO Box 376
Baulkham Hills, NSW 1755

Dear Mr. Leyonhjelm,

I am writing in response to your inquiry concerning Labor's policy position in relation to sporting shooters.

Labor distinguishes between the criminal use of firearms and their legitimate use by sporting and recreational shooters.

Federal Labor will seek to ensure that firearms cannot be illegally imported into Australia by focusing on strong border protection and enforcement of import restrictions. This is one of the goals of our Coastguard policy.

In conjunction with its State colleagues, Labor will work with sporting and recreational shooting organisations to control the criminal use of firearms without adversely affecting legitimate sporting and recreational shooters.

I am also aware of the concerns of sporting shooters in relation to the Malabar rifle range and the prospects of finding a replacement rifle range in the Sydney area.

While land-use issues are primarily a State matter, Labor in office would use its best endeavours to assist in identifying an appropriate and suitable site to which sporting shooters might move following the loss of the rifle range at Malabar.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Latham'.

MARK LATHAM

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*Telexed by Minister
22/5/06 - Budget Est.*



10 September 2004

Christian Zahra MP
Federal Member for McMillan

18-20 Kirk Street, Mos 3825
PO Box 318, Mos 3825



380-3956
Paul and Jennifer O'Sullivan
1720 Buffalo Waratah Road
TARWIN LOWER VIC 3956

Dear Paul and Jennifer

Saying one thing about a serious local problem in order to get votes, while knowing that the party you represent caused the problem in the first place and has done nothing to fix it is a pretty low act.

But that's exactly what the Liberal and National candidates for the Federal seat of McMillan have been doing in relation to wind farms in our district.

They're trying to blame everyone else for the wind power developments in South Gippsland. But they know that the only reason they are being built in South Gippsland right now is because the Federal Coalition Government introduced legislation in 2000 that provides huge, unconditional financial incentives to wind power companies.

My position has always been that wind power stations are not an appropriate fit for the beautiful South Gippsland coast and that they should only go where local communities support them.

That's why I introduced a Private Member's Bill that would have changed the Howard-Anderson Government's legislation to make the subsidies provided to wind power developers conditional on the support of the local community.

I came up with a good, simple legislative proposal that would have given local communities a say in where these developments are located. But the Howard-Anderson Government refused to allow my Bill to be debated and passed into law.

The local Federal Liberal and National Party candidates have been trying to get some personal political advantage from local people's concerns about wind power stations in the last couple of weeks.

At the same time, not one Federal Member of Parliament from either of their parties has done anything to change the law to give local people a say on the location of wind power developments.

Words are easy, but finding solutions is what counts. That's why I'm happy to stand on my record in relation to this issue. The truth is that you just can't trust people who suddenly start talking about an issue a few weeks out from a Federal election, when they're desperately looking for votes.

Yours sincerely

Christian Zahra MP
Federal Member for McMillan

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Always putting our community first.

Tabled by
Minister for the
Env. & Heritage
25/5/06



FEDERAL LABOR LEADER MARK LATHAM

TRANSCRIPT OF DOORSTOP

PERTH

27 SEPTEMBER 04

E&OE *

Subjects: Election Campaign 2004

LATHAM: I'm here today with Jacinta Collins and Sharryn Jackson to launch Labor's plan for early childhood development. I'd like to thank Ann and everyone at the Wirrabirra Centre for having us here today. It's the most fun I've had since I was last at home. It was tremendous to play with the kids and be part of their day, but our main purpose here of course is to launch this very important plan, our plan for early childhood development.

Since I've been Labor Leader, I've tried to give the early years a national profile, in recognition that learning doesn't start the first day of school; it starts the first day of life. In the things that we've achieved from Opposition, the profile we've given to reading aloud to our infant children, the whole importance of the early years has been gratifying indeed. I've had so many parents who've mentioned to me that it is great to hear about the importance of reading to early years. In so many respects this has been the missing link in our system of lifelong learning in Australia. The traditional thinking that learning starts with the beginning of the school years of course ignores the fact that from nought to four, these are the formative years, the years of brain development, language development, the little personalities and minds are racing.

We neglect the full potential of our children if we don't have a comprehensive national plan for early childhood development and that's what Labor is putting forward here today. The experts of course point out that early intervention, investing early in the childhood years, is important. That's the commonsense that every parent in the country knows. It's just a shame that until now we haven't had a national plan for early childhood development. So we want to make this a successful investment in the nation's future. It's not just about child care as child minding; we want child care to be early childhood development. We want this to be a regular part of the education system – to think of pre-school and child care as part of the education system and the development of the skills and capacity of our young Australians.

The core purpose of our early childhood development agenda is about quality and it's about learning. It's about seeing it as part of the education system. We want child care to be more than child minding. That's an important function. It's an important part of the work and family arguments, the labour market arguments. But, for the young ones themselves, it's an opportunity to start the formal learning process in life and that's an opportunity that's too good to miss, an opportunity we've got to take for their benefit, an opportunity we've got to take as a nation.

All the other aspects of our policy hang off that core purpose about learning and education – issues like access, affordability, training, staffing levels, resourcing, disadvantage programs. The Howard Government was promising an early childhood agenda for many years: they never delivered. This is Labor's commitment to the future of the next generation, the youngest generation of Australians.

There are several important elements in our plan. The first is that we're introducing a universal free day of care and learning each week for all three and four-year-olds eligible for the child care benefit. This is quite a historic move. You can think back to more than 100 years ago when they first said, 'Oh, let's have free public education, free schooling for young people from the age of five onwards.' This is Labor saying we want the universal free day of learning and opportunity for all the three and four-year-olds who currently qualify for the child care benefit. That's if their mums and dads are in work, study, or community volunteering – whatever purpose brings them into the child care benefit, they'll have a free day under Labor whereby you've got that universal entitlement. They can start their formal learning in a child care centre and also through pre-school arrangements that we are separately funding. This initiative, lifting the child care benefit for the free day – the 10 hours – to an hourly rate of \$4.88, so that's \$49 a day. This will save families around the country between \$20 and \$44 a week. It's a policy to lift the financial pressure on families, to ease the squeeze on middle Australia, in particular. That's a significant financial benefit for the families involved.

For a typical family in the child care sector, they use the service two or three days a week to correspond with their own work arrangements, this is going to be quite a significant benefit. But it's also most particularly for the children, our universal entitlement to access learning programs in child care. As I say, we see it as an extension of the public education, the free education principles and access we've had in our schools, to bring that down into the early childhood years. It is a great national purpose. It will improve massively in the years ahead the outcomes that we have in school and post-secondary education – indeed, the skills and capacity of a whole nation.

The second element in our plan is to invest an extra \$252 million in State based pre-schools. That's around \$350 entitlement for each student. We want to work through COAG, work with the State and Territories, for a national standard of provision to bring the pre-school arrangements as close as possible to what we're doing in child care. That will involve improved access and affordability, increased quality. We basically want to move towards universal pre-school and child care learning programs for all three and four-year-olds, and to have in place the free day arrangement is a very important start, the foundation stone, in that respect.

The third aspect of our policy is to increase the number of long-day care places by 6,500 with a particular emphasis on baby care – nought to two. This has been the area of great shortage. We have a paucity of long-day care places right around the country. It is particularly tough for people who live on the suburban edge and have got the long travelling times: if they haven't got the long-day care place then of course they haven't got an opportunity to get into the work force and realise their own aspirations and financial potential. So an extra 6,500 places, emphasising the baby care. There will be 87 new services and they'll have to provide a minimum of 15 baby spots – nought to two – so we can fill that gap that's been left by the Howard Government.

The fourth aspect of the policy is to increase the number of out of school hour places by 8,000 over four years, providing extra flexibility to help people balance their work, families, study and community demands. Another initiative is to boost learning resources for Family Day Care and playgroups. Again, we want this to be more than child minding, we want it to be early childhood development, so we'll be putting significant money into books, learning materials, so the Family Day Care and the playgroups can have that all important learning component. Basically, where children gather at age three and four, we want a learning component. We want a learning exercise being undertaken for the benefit of those children.

The sixth initiative, the final initiative I'll mention before handing over to Jacinta, is the one that I've particularly promoted and is close to my own heart and practices at home, the Read Aloud Program, the provision of three books for the

new bubs – one at birth, one when the parents enrol at the local library and one if they do the Adult Literacy Program. So we're providing the books for learning materials to encourage parents to read aloud in the home. All the studies and commonsense indicate that if you read three books a night to the infant children they'll be literate and have numbers by the time they go to school at age five. What a great investment. It happens in most of the homes around the country – I've been promoting it to the hilt but, for those parents who haven't got the adult literacy skills and confidence to do it, we'll have a \$40 million investment in adult literacy so they can do the programs to make them confident in this area and pass on those advantages of reading aloud to their infant children and give them the flying start in life.

Our plan is comprehensive. It's not just affordability, it's not just access, it's not just work force arrangements, it's not just quality; it is a big commitment to education and learning to early childhood development. You need that comprehensive plan to make it a real policy for the future. Anyone can throw money at problems in public life. Anyone can throw money out prior to an election, but you actually need the big structured improvements to get it right, particularly in such an important area as early childhood development. We owe it to the children to get it right. Labor has got the comprehensive plan, and we think it's overwhelmingly the right approach in this key sector.

Jacinta will now speak about the other initiatives – the resource centres, the parenting programs, the home visits, the disadvantaged initiatives and also the work force measures and planning as part of our comprehensive plan for the benefit of these great little Australians. Thanks, Jacinta.

COLLINS: Thank you very much, Mark, and thank you for the support in getting this agenda up publicly for Australian children. As Mark pointed out, we have a better plan, with genuine elements of reform, unlike the Howard plan announced yesterday. All three and four-year-olds will be eligible for this free day. However, some may choose to remain exclusively in the State pre-school systems. If that's the case, they will get relief through our other measure. But let's be clear: all three and four-year-olds would be eligible to take up approved CCB places and get access to this free day, regardless of what their mother or father may be doing. It is not linked to a work test, like the one Howard announced yesterday. It also provides relief to children in pre-schools, unlike the measure announced by the Howard Government yesterday.

But, further to that, in the broader plan, we also include \$9 million of funding to develop integrated children's services. So, like this service here, there is an integration for children between care and pre-school services – that arrangements are put in place to ensure that all of our children, when they are four years of age can access the State funded pre-school systems if they're needing CCB funded care as well. Also we want to integrate with other services

for families so that families can have a one-stop-shop, so to speak, rather than needing to do drop offs and pick ups around five different locations, depending upon their number of children and where else those children might be but also to allow specialist services to be integrated with child care so that you can have immunisation and specialist visits occurring as part of the child care experience.

Further to that, we have an extra \$50 million of funding coined A HeadStart for New Parents. This builds upon the Howard Government's Stronger Families funding but has a clear strategy about what outcomes we hope to achieve for families and children receiving assistance under this program. One of those clear outcomes, for instance, is to improve the maternal child health home visitation services, free visits for children and their mother shortly after the birth of a child to ensure that they are getting that best start at that very early stage in childhood development.

We also have a broader focus on disadvantaged children. We are announcing today 13 new MACS services – they're integrated Indigenous services. There has been no increase for many years under the Howard Government in the integrated child care services available for Indigenous children. We are also building on a pilot run by Hanover Services in Victoria on additional support for homeless children. These are children who, because of their parent's homelessness, have developmental delays and need additional assistance to help their early childhood development and we're directing \$35 million there.

Further we will also build on additional support for children that have special or additional needs. Under Read Aloud Australia the outreach workers that we've put in place to help parents and children with literacy difficulties will also work with children with additional needs issues to ensure that they're integrated into the broad range of child services. This includes ensuring that they have access to child care places, ensuring they have access to pre-schools, ensuring that they can become involved in playgroup services, and Family Day Care services.

Now, many say, what's the point of all of this, if you can't solve the crisis in the number of workers working within child care? We know that there is a shortage of child care workers and there is no point generating new places if you can't find the workers to work in those places. Unlike the Howard Government, Labor will have a work force plan. We announce here today that, as part of that plan, we will instigate training bonuses to encourage more child care workers to re-enter work in child care but also to undertake further training as well. Further to that, we're putting funds into planning to deal with a range of other issues that need to be dealt with amongst the child care work force.

The final point I'll make, which is included in this statement, is the importance of planning. The Howard Government withdrew from planning in the provision of long-day care child care places, places such as those in this centre here, and this is where the critical shortage has now been. This is because in long-day care

places there was no growth, despite growing community demand for long-day care place, there was no growth for four years up until the last year. The Howard Government refers to the growth in outside school hour care places. When it throws numbers, they are just saying that there has been overall growth. But in the number of places available for parents who want to place the child in a child-care centre such as this, there has been very limited growth. We have announced today that we will boost the number of places but we'll do it a planned way so that communities, such as this one here, where the Department of Family and Community Services highlights that there is a critical shortage. Rather than just waiting for the private sector to take its time to get involved in areas particularly those of disadvantage, we will give additional support to the community based sector to establish services where they're needed and required and to also ensure that diversity remains in the delivery of early childhood services. That's our broad plan. It's a better plan than that delivered by the Howard Government. The Howard Government has dropped the ball on developing a national agenda for early childhood. This plan includes genuine elements of reform and it will be a significant investment in the future of Australia's children.

JOURNALIST: Mr Latham, why would parents prefer this free day to the rebate that John Howard offered yesterday?

LATHAM: It is part of a comprehensive plan. It is not a political tactic like Mr Howard has got to throw money around. It is part of a comprehensive plan that involves early childhood development. It's part of a learning system. It's part of the education system. It is not only financial relief but it's helping children develop their full potential in life by saying that, for three and four-year-olds in this country, we want a universal free day of learning that's funded by the Government. It's the equivalent of what we've done for so many years, so many decades, in the school system. You've got a real plan here to develop the children, as well as provide the financial relief for families that allows them to get into the day of learning free of charge. That is just so much more beneficial. I know that as a parent money matters – we all know that as parents – but what really matters, what's really in your heart, the thing that you are really desperate for in life is the great start for the children. If you've got the emphasis on learning and early childhood development, and reading books, and developing their personalities, their minds, their brains, their potential, their intelligence in life that's the thing that every parent wants. Of course financial relief is important and we can point out the ways in which our financial relief will go much further than the Howard Government for typical families and in particular circumstances but the thing that we're putting forward is a genuine plan for early childhood development. That overwhelmingly is in the interests of the nation and the interests of the parents who've got the little ones.

JOURNALIST: How does you plan financially benefit parents more than the Coalition's plan?

LATHAM: If you look at, say, a couple called Joseph and Anna, they've got two children, they use 25 hours per week long-day care – so that's a very typical scenario; the typical family in Australia uses two and half days a week – they've got one child aged four, they've got a combined income of \$55,000 – again, they're middle Australia – they currently pay \$55 a week in gap fees. Under our child care free day they gain \$22; under the Coalition's 30 per cent rebate they get \$15 per week. So the typical family type in Australia is ahead by \$7. On top of that we're funding the equivalent benefit for an extra 240,000 pre-school students who were totally left out of the Howard Government policy. Our free day is also available to people outside the work force. So the mums who do the great community service – helping out in the tuck shop at the local school and they've got their little one in the child care centre, they're eligible for our free day. We have it in place for those extra circumstances, pre-school – 240,000, that's a big number. The families where one of the parents is undertaking community work is still qualifying for the child care benefit.

We'd also argue that our policy is superior because, under the Howard Government approach, obviously you can't access a rebate if you can't find a place and there is a terrible paucity of long-day care places that we are trying to correct with our expansion, the extra places that we're putting in. Also, our financial benefit is available weekly. With the Government's you have to wait until the end of the year. These expenses are weekly. They haven't been happening right now so it is obviously better to have the benefit weekly instead of at the end of the year. We've got an emphasis on quality because, for a lot of parents the main thing – obviously the finances are important but the main thing you are worried about is that when you're handing your child over to the custody and care of others the peace of mind comes from the quality care, the great child care workers, so you can go and do your own work knowing the children will be well looked after. Unless you've got quality access and a broader approach that involves pre-school, then you're really selling short the potential of these financial advantages.

JOURNALIST: Won't parents using three days or more be financially better off under the Coalition's plan and the 30 per cent rebate?

LATHAM: If you go out to five days that's the case but the typical instance in Australia, the typical work and family balance, is the second parent doing two or three days a week paid work and using child care for that amount as well. So we're matching up to the real life Australian circumstances where, invariably, in the vast majority of cases the second parent is in the work force on a part-time basis. These been an extraordinary explosion in part-time and casual work in Australia and our policy is designed to match up to that circumstance.

JOURNALIST: Isn't there a danger that by formalising the education process in the early childhood that even parents who are staying at home with their kids might feel pressure to put their kids into care for one or two days a week just so their kids are keeping up with the others?

LATHAM: It's a choice and every parent wants the very best start in life for their children. For the parents at home, whether it's at home tonight or at home right now, we've got the Read Aloud Program to help with reading and literacy programs – so all the parents are educating their children in the home by reading aloud. That's important, but I think for parents it's an option; it's a choice and it's part of the balance of life. I mean, in a busy life these days, if you are working, you've got the obvious family commitments, the love and care, you might have study commitments. We all talk about lifelong learning, retraining, study commitments and of course we are not just members of families we belong to communities and there would be hundreds of parents today helping in the tuck shop, helping the charities, supporting older Australians. So getting the balance right – when you talk about work and family, I've always thought it's work, family, study and community. Having the flexibility of having the child care place, the free day, for the learning and benefit of your child, to help you balance all of those things, I think that is the best policy, the best way of thinking about how we can help parents as they make those particular choices and juggle all those priorities in their busy lives.

JOURNALIST: Whose plan will benefit more families, overall, financially?

LATHAM: We've got the benefit there for 480,000 children, those in pre-school, those in child care, three and four. But I've just got to make the point that while we've got a very good financial initiative; we come at this as early childhood development. My point is any politician, a couple of weeks before an election, can say, 'Look here's a fistfull of dollars. Be mesmerized by that.' It doesn't mean you're going to get it after the election, and we've got a bad record of Coalition governments that pull the money back and you never see it. We actually need real plans for the benefit of the country, and our starting point is education. It's learning, it's early childhood development. And off that we hang our financial benefits which we can argue are more substantial for the typical family balancing all these priorities. We've got quality initiatives, work force initiatives, reading aloud in the home. It's a comprehensive plan as opposed to a political tactic that is cobbled together at the last minute, the fistfull of dollars that people probably won't see after the election.

JOURNALIST: Mr Latham, the policy says that it is fully funded but you haven't identified any savings. How are you going to pay for it?

LATHAM: Are you from the *Australian Financial Review*?

JOURNALIST: [inaudible]

LATHAM: I mean, this is just a useful campaign resource – I don't always agree with the things that are in your editorials but isn't it great that every day in the campaign on page 10 the *Australian Financial Review* does this wonderful community service, spreading information about this campaign? It points out spendometer. 'Coalition promises on top of the budget.' Under savings, every morning you've got to get your microscope out, your magnifying glass, and you will see that the Coalition has made savings of \$0.9 billion. Then you go down to Labor, 'Promises on top of the latest budget updates.' 'Savings' \$21 billion – that's \$21 billion of savings that we've identified with more to come. I mean the great community service we get in the *Australian Financial Review* every day makes a stunning point about economic responsibility. What would you ever say about a party that only produced \$0.9 billion worth of savings? They've given up on the efficiency of Government. They've given up on identifying waste and mismanagement. They've given up on giving the taxpayers value for money and the public should give up on them. Any party that produces such a miniscule bar graph as that, the public should give up on them, because they've given up on economic responsibility. We've got commitments that are funded by \$21 billion of savings and more to come in the course of this campaign.

JOURNALIST: By the end of the campaign, will the two bars be equal there? Will you [inaudible] zero?

LATHAM: I tell you what: we're going to be a lot more equal than the party above us on the *Fin Review* spendometer because at the moment they're \$20 billion short. Mr Howard likes the cricket analogy where they go short run – he's \$20 billion short in terms of economic responsibility – that's a big short run: \$20 billion short run in terms of his economic credentials.

JOURNALIST: But are you funding this policy from the surplus as opposed to savings?

LATHAM: We'll be identifying further savings in the course of the campaign. It is fully costed and fully funded.

JOURNALIST: Just getting on to this issue of choice. Mr Howard in his child care announcements yesterday was talking about stay at home mums. There was this big package for stay at home mums. I know –

LATHAM: It was a \$300 increase in FTB B – I wouldn't call it a big package, another fistfull of dollars.

JOURNALIST: I think it was a billion dollars or something – you were just talking about the read aloud but what else is in this package for stay at home mums? How does this integrate with choice?

LATHAM: It is the chance to have their children in learning programs, pre-school and child care. Stay-at-home mums do a great job in nurturing their children but that powerful combination of education and learning in the home – that formal education which to this point in time in Australia we thought that happens at school age, when they're five. What we're saying is let's do it at three and four. Let's combine the resources and get the learning happening in both settings – the formal setting and the home learning environment – so that we're fulfilling the potential of three and four-year-old children. That's a great advantage but you know from our tax and family package that we're not just engaged in financial benefits; we're actually solving problems, the two tax-free thresholds. Solving the family debt crisis, providing financial incentive for people to move from welfare to work. We're the only party putting forward the real improvements that represent a plan for the future as opposed to a political tactic cobbled together on a Sunday morning?

COLLINS: Can I add on stay-at-home mums. Stay-at-home mums are much better off under this package. Stay-at-home mums under the Howard package have no access to the 30 per cent rebate, no access at all whereas stay-at-home mums will have access to our free one day of care or, if they choose to continue exclusively using the pre-school, they'll get the value of the \$350 per year per child we're putting into the State system. When mums choose to stay at home, many of them also choose to stay within the State based, community based pre-school systems for three and four-year-olds and what Labor is saying is that's a valid choice and we will help fund it.

LATHAM: That's a good point because Mr Howard is looking at the stay at home mums as a financial equation. But it leaves out the great priority that all parents give to the education and development of their children. I mean, if that's not a big part of your lives, I think Mr Howard has got a very very strange understanding of what parents really want for the future.

JOURNALIST: How far are these extra places going to go? It is not going to mean that every parent who wants long-day care place is going to get it, is it?

LATHAM: No, the 6,500 places should be about 14,000 children will benefit, given the fact that a couple of children will fill the places at various parts of the week so 14,000 that helps. It's hard to measure the extent of the backlog, other than anecdotally talking to parents. But 14,000, along with the out-of-school care, the extra places there, obviously makes a good difference and that needs to be a priority. What we've identified here is a whole range of problems that need to be solved simultaneously as part of a comprehensive plan.

JOURNALIST: The wages for child care workers has been identified as a key problem in the last couple of years. Why have you chosen not to do something to try and lift the wages for child care workers?

LATHAM: There's a claim current before the tribunal and we've said that we will support the outcome of that claim but we don't know what it's going to be. I assume the Howard Government would be supporting the outcome of the claim, notwithstanding some of the criticisms that Peter Costello has made in the past. He has said that paying child care workers too much is part of the problem in this sector. I don't think you can ever have a world class system, unless we regard child care workers as professional people, valuable workers who should be held in high regard and paid a decent amount. I've seen some of the comparisons – garbos do a great job but I tell you what child care workers should be paid more than that, in terms of the work and service that they do for our society. The Howard Government must have to factor that in as well because if the argument runs that, if the wages go up, the costs of child care will go up they'll have that extra cost in their 30 per cent rebate just as we will have to deal with it in Government as well.

JOURNALIST: John Howard spent a lot more money yesterday. Can we expect Labor to perhaps try and match some of that on Wednesday?

LATHAM: We don't see this as a spendathon. We don't see this as a spendometer campaign. We see it as a problem solving opportunity for the benefit of the Australian people. I mean, in this country, there is a rich and unfortunate history of parties that have thrown money at problems but didn't necessarily solve them. You just end up with more waste and mismanagement and worse off than when you started. Throwing money at a public issue and problem doesn't necessarily solve it. You actually need a plan about the future rather than a clearance sale, rather than a giveaway, rather than Crazy John's clearance sale. I mean, you've actually got to do a lot better than that and that's what we're on about. We don't see this as an expenditure exercise. It's a problem solving exercise that's about improvements. It's about structured gains for the Australian people and if resources matter you back them into the policies that will be getting the results in the future.

JOURNALIST: This morning Mr Howard said there is a community expectation that the Government will never put the budget into deficit. Do you agree with him?

LATHAM: He said that prior to the last election and then it went into deficit so he doesn't even agree with himself.

JOURNALIST: But do you agree?

LATHAM: If you keep spending at this rate of course it's going to go into deficit. They said prior to the last federal election there would be no deficits and they bobbed up straightaway with a deficit in the budget accounts. So he's got bad form. He's on a spendathon. He did it prior to the last election. The budget bobbed into deficit and, if he keeps it up in this election, it is bound to be

in deficit under the Coalition but certainly not under Labor. Again, because as you see in the *Financial Review* every day we're the only party making significant savings. Go the spendometer: it proves us to be the party of economic responsibility and downward pressure on interest rates.

JOURNALIST: Are you committing a Labor Government to always have a surplus budget?

LATHAM: Yes.

JOURNALIST: What do you think of this idea of giving money direct to school committees, the P&Cs?

LATHAM: Parental involvement in schools matters but I would have thought that parents want a coordinated approach. Everyone is trying to work for the benefit of the children. You couldn't have a system where the P&C decides to fund one project, the education department goes off in a competing direction or, even worse, there is duplication where they're both planning the same project and funding the same bit of work. I would have thought you need to get people together. Mr Howard has got this divisive view in public education that you've got to divide people. Let's divide the P&C from the teachers; let's divide the teachers from the education authorities. Well, let's actually get them together working cooperatively for the benefit of the school because, at the end of the day, it is not what you think of the unions, or the P&C or the State Government, it's what you think of the children. I know for a fact that we're going to get the best results for the children if we all work together for their benefit instead of playing silly politics with their future.

JOURNALIST: Are there currently enough places available to provide this universal one day free a week for three and four-year-olds?

LATHAM: It's available to those who are in a place. There are 240,000 and we've got expansion plans that factor in growth as well.

JOURNALIST: Mr Latham, how are you going to pick the books for the Read Aloud Program? Who gets to pick the books?

LATHAM: There is a recognised list of children's books that are approved. We don't let unsuitable books go out there. Of course, any of the [inaudible] book shops, parents complain to the Government and that's how it's dealt with. How do you pick the books? I mean, the parents would have a pretty good understanding of what's available. People of my age – I can remember Dr Zeus and you've got Mem Fox. There'll be an approved list of books. It's about the system that people have – the book vouchers – and people use that for the approved books. I don't know what you're driving at there but if you nick down to Dymocks or Angus and Robertson's or any other bookstore the kids books are all pretty clean.

JOURNALIST: Can you expand on the Indigenous sector of this?

COLLINS: The Indigenous statement deals with generating another 13 MACS services – they're the multifunctional indigenous child care services. At the moment there's been no growth in those services but a growth in demand for Indigenous child care and often that's also linked in assisting the early development of Indigenous children so those centres are established and generally community run in the Indigenous communities. It is a model that we know works, that the Government and Department of Family and Community Services tell us work, but there's been no growth in those services for quite some time. We are proposing another 13 services that we'll deliver to more Indigenous children.

JOURNALIST: You talked about a universal pre-school system. You have identified that as something you would like Government to provide

LATHAM: Working with COAG and the States, yes. We want to bring these same principles into the pre-school system. Where you've got very uneven provision around the country and different pricing arrangements, we want to put the \$250 million on the table and work with the States to get a national standard of provision and affordability and access.

JOURNALIST: By when?

LATHAM: As soon as that can be done. It will be one of the – we are going to meet more often with COAG and we've got more opportunities for cooperation, Federal and State Labor, and this education initiative is very important. I think this is the main thing out of what we're saying here today that this not just dollars and cents. It is important financial relief, the free day really matters for parents, but this is part of the education system. This is a step forward that we've never seen in this country. You know, to step forward into saying that three and four-year-olds are going to have entitlements and opportunities for formal learning and education. That is such an advance for the skills, capacity and potential of our country. This is education policy and not just financial relief for families.

JOURNALIST: Mr Latham, you were having a great time playing with the kids. There's been a lot of talk about the lack of male role models. Pre-school and child care is predominantly a female industry; do you think there should be a way of encouraging more men to get into the industry?

LATHAM: Yes, well, some men do.

Interjection – a decent pay rate.

LATHAM: Ann has given the best answer that a decent pay rate would obviously be helpful but I think it's also a question of male identity. The

traditional male role of being dominant in the work force, muscle and machine power, being the dominant breadwinner. That has all weakened for obvious and in most respects good reasons that we've got greater equality between men and women in the work force in our society. So men are reaching out for new sources of identity. I've promoted the value of fatherhood, being a parent. I think men need to be understanding and encouraging of other men who decide to be stay-at-home dads and do what I was doing every day of the week. So, too, we need to be encouraging of men who want to work with children and be part of the child care sector and pre-school and be teachers. We've got initiatives to try and bring men back into the teaching professions, to provide those male role models. So its not just about the role models for the children, its also I think an important way of saying to men, 'Look, life has not ended because we are no longer dominant breadwinners as much as we used to be. There are actually many, many more loving and wonderful experiences in life that come out of parenthood, working with children' and that's a great thing for men to think about and aspire to.

JOURNALIST: What happens if the tribunal doesn't agree with the pay increase? You've already said that they should be paid more. Will you commit to paying them more even if the tribunal says you don't have to?

LATHAM: It's an industrial matter, you see. You know in our industrial relations policy we support the independent umpire and we'll be looking to see what result is achieved so we will just have to wait and see what happens. Thanks very much.

[Ends]