



# HARD LABOR

## PM, ministers wear out staff

State SPA Committee  
Tabled Document

Inquiry: Estimates Budget  
Date/Time: 27/5/10 1:35pm  
Witness Name: Sen Ronaldson  
Organisation: .....

STEVE LEWIS, ALISON REHN  
CANBERRA

KEVIN Rudd and his ministers have emerged as Australia's most demanding bosses with near record staff burnout of 60 per cent in just over two years.

Despite pledging to tear up former Prime Minister John Howard's WorkChoices, 262 ministerial staff, from a total of 444, have departed since Labor came to office.

And while Mr Rudd surged to office on

a promise to get rid of rogue employers, three of his own ministers have recorded a staff turnover of 100 per cent-plus.

The Prime Minister has now lost 28 staff with Government insiders describing his office as resembling an airport "transit lounge".

Continued Page 6

# Rudd, ministers wear out staff

From Page 1

Some former staff members are privately seething about his employment style, claiming he can fly off the handle at a moment's notice.

The pace of Labor's 24/7 reform agenda has taken its toll across the board.

Deputy Prime Minister and Workplace Relations Minister Julia Gillard has lost 12 of her staff, while Climate Change Minister Penny Wong has shed 14.

Newly appointed Population Minister Tony Burke has suffered an 81 per cent turnover, losing 13 of his staff.

The highest turnover, though, goes to the Sports and Youth Minister Kate Ellis - with 130 per cent.

The South Australian Minister, who last week posed for a glamorous photo shoot, has had 13 staff leave her office.

At least one was a part-time university student while several others left to have families. But the staff exodus has alarmed recruitment specialists who say the private sector "norm" is closer to 10 per cent a year.

"It's a very high number by any standard I am aware of," Australian Human Resources Institute president, Peter Wilson said.

Brooklyn Group chief executive Brian Russell also queried why gov-

ernment advisers had left in droves.

"You shouldn't be having 100 per cent turnover in any team. If you've got autocratic management, lack of direction, people will leave," he said.

"And every time you lose someone it costs the taxpayer money, huge money."

The costs of replacing these staff is close to \$800,000 based on parliamentary estimates - but long-term Labor loyalists say the "costs" can't be just measured in dollars and cents.

The exodus of staff includes long-serving ALP staffers who are simply "f...ing exhausted" according to one well placed source.

A Government insider says another reason for the large numbers of departures was that Mr Rudd's election attracted "blow-ins who thought it would be like *West Wing*."

Instead, many have found the work-and-life balance almost non-existent and left for less stressful jobs, in the private sector, in the bureaucracy or working for state Labor governments.

Furthermore, Veterans Affairs Minister Alan Griffin has seen 12 staff leave his office - for a turnover of 108 per cent.

And the Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliott, has a similar turnover, after

losing 13 of her employees.

Some of the departures can be explained by ministers receiving new duties. Special Minister of State Joe Ludwig has lost 12 of his staff - but he was transferred from the Human Services portfolio in mid-2009.

In total, 21 of Mr Rudd's 28 ministers have suffered staff turnover of 50 per cent or more.

But several Ministers have managed to retain almost all their loyal employees including Housing Minister Tanya Plibersek, who has shed just two advisers.

Families and Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin has lost just four staff, as has Financial Services Minister, Chris Bowen.

Labor enforcer Anthony Albanese has retained all but four of his staff.

Innovation and Industry Minister Kim Carr recently lost the "core" of his political staff including science adviser Andrew Reeves, who left in February after nine years with the Victorian Labor Senator.

But Senator Carr is considered a good boss and some of his staff - such as electorate office manager Glen Kelly - has been on his payroll for more than 10 years.





# It's a dog's life at the top

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard moved yesterday to defend Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's reputation as a boss, saying he was "very easy to work with".

Mr Rudd also batted away suggestions that he was a tough taskmaster, after a report that 28 staff had left his 53-person office in almost 2½ years in government.

The latest revelations about turnover at the top of the federal government came as Mr Rudd and Ms Gillard continued a round of election campaign-style appearances, defending the government's healthcare and education policies before a community cabinet in Sydney last night.

But Mr Rudd stepped back from daily political combat to applaud Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's completion of the 1000-kilometre Pollie Pedal bike ride from Melbourne to Sydney.

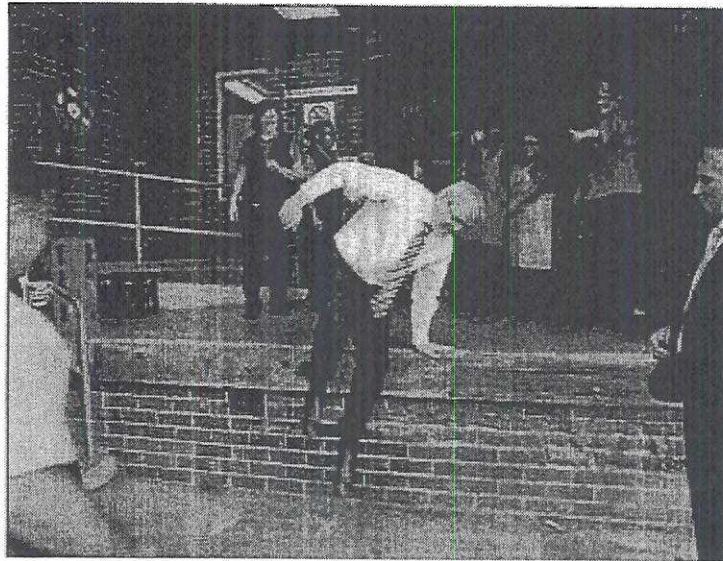
"If it was me, [I would have] probably got to day two, I'd have to put on the trainer wheels and then fall off. Good on him," Mr Rudd said.

No Labor politicians participated in the event this year, apparently because it is an election year. Mr Abbott has faced criticism for participating instead of concentrating solely on his job as Opposition Leader.

Ms Gillard's comments on Mr Rudd's work habits followed a report that staff turnover in Rudd government ministerial offices is running at about 60 per cent.

Ms Gillard said lifestyle factors associated with working in Canberra meant some people lasted only a short time in political work.

"Obviously people come to be



**Kevin Rudd leaps through a Ryde Hospital visit yesterday.** Photo: NICK MOIR

political advisers because they share a passion and enthusiasm for change, and a passion and enthusiasm to work with politicians to make a difference," she said.

"Working for a national politician means that you've got to be prepared to be in Canberra for big parts of the year ... that means people being away from home ... or travelling around the nation."

Mr Rudd told Fairfax radio that one of his staff had commented recently that one year with him was akin to a "dog year", equal to seven human years.

"So folks stay with me for three or four years - that's probably 28 or 30 years or more in actual time."

Mr Rudd said his health reform

plan required months of burning the midnight oil. He doubted the public was especially sympathetic to public servants and staff having to work until 10 o'clock at night.

"No, actually they want to have their hospitals fixed," he said.

But Liberal MP Jamie Briggs said Mr Rudd was hard to work with.

"We've got a Prime Minister who is a different person behind closed doors to what he is on television.

"It's very important that there's a corporate knowledge within these [government] offices, and that corporate knowledge disappears very quickly when you have staff turnover like this."

**AAP**





Canberra Times  
Friday 16/4/2010  
Page: 2  
Section: General News  
Region: Canberra Circulation: 33,511  
Type: Capital City Daily  
Size: 140.47 sq.cms.  
Frequency: MTWTFSS-

Senate F&PA Committee

Brief: DPLAUTO  
Tabled Document

Inquiry: Budget Estimates

Date/Time: 27/5 1:35 pm  
Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) licenced copy  
or Copyright Act 1968 (Cwlth) s. 48A copy

Witness Name: Sen Ronaldson

Organisation: .....

# Rudd blames Canberra for staff turnover

By Danielle Cronin  
Political Correspondent

An ACT Senator is outraged that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has blamed the "Canberra lifestyle" for high staff turnover within his administration.

Politics was a tough environment, according to Mr Rudd, who suggested one year working as a ministerial staffer was probably akin to seven years in a "normal" job.

"It's probably like a dog year... so folks stay with me for three or four years, that's probably 28 or 30 years or more in actual time," he said. "People get the opportunity to travel to Canberra, to live there, to stay there... from Sydney and Melbourne, and some of them are not entirely attracted by the Canberra lifestyle. They are separated from family, they go to Canberra and sometimes it actually has an impact on their lives, but it's a tough job."

ACT Liberal Senator Gary Humphries said the Mr Rudd's comments

were "outrageous" and "unfair".

"Why blame the lifestyle in Canberra for a high rate of turnover of staff when there have been federal governments based in Canberra for generations and they haven't experienced turnover like this?" he asked.

"I don't what he means by... ['Canberra lifestyle']. Either it's too boring or too cold or what, I don't know."

"He obviously didn't intend to explain the comment. He just was relying, in making the comment, on prejudice in other parts of Australia about Canberra."

"If he makes a throwaway line about 'My poor staff can't cope with those sort of eggheads in Canberra' or 'That cold weather or that strange environment in Canberra', it probably gets nods in certain parts of the country."

Senator Humphries said the Rudd Government had cut ministerial staff

ing levels by about 30 per cent and remaining staff had the same or greater workloads, which caused burn-out.

Blaming staff or the environs was simply "spin".

"If we was talking about Canberra of 50 or 60 years ago, he might have had a point, but that's not the Canberra of today. It's a great place to live and to work. Every federal member I've every spoke to actually agrees privately," he said.



**UNFAIR:** Senator Gary Humphries





**Senate F&PA Committee**  
 Tabled Document  
Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) licenced copy  
 or Copyright Act 1968 (Cwlth) s. 48A copy

Inquiry: *Budget Estimates*  
 Date/Time: *27/5 1:35 pm*  
 Address: *Sen Ronaldson*  
 Organisation: .....

# Staff burnt by Rudd workload

SID MAHER

PUBLIC policy experts have warned that the federal public service is being pushed beyond its limits into areas normally managed by the states in the wake of the failure of the Rudd government's \$2.5 billion insulation program.

As the government suspended the program yesterday, it emerged that a risk assessment of the program by MinterEllison Consulting warned last April that the Environment Department lacked the experience, staff and regulatory capabilities to properly roll out the program, which has been linked to at least 86 house fires and the deaths of four

installers.

The report questioned whether the department had enough staff. It warned of the potential for burn-out and identified enforcement of the program as a risk. Bureaucrats would be forced to rely on contracts rather than legislation and regulation would be through third parties.

The warning will reignite the debate about whether the Rudd government's policy program is overambitious, forcing the bureaucracy to rush programs and increasing the risk of failure and wasting taxpayer funds.

Tensions with the public service flared in 2008 when Kevin

Rudd warned that the pace was going to increase even amid complaints of excessive working hours including the case of a Treasury official forced to work 36 hours straight.

As the government grappled with the global financial crisis the pace increased. Cabinet met 44 times in the 2008-09 financial year compared with 30 in 2007-08. Cabinet committee meetings ballooned to 235 from 104 the year before.

And the department struggled to keep up with the pace. It delivered cabinet minutes within the benchmark 24 hours 74 per cent of the time, an improvement on

the 56 per cent in 2007-08 but down from the 94 per cent in the last year of the Howard government. The number of cabinet minutes recorded spiked to 1543 from 811 the year before.

The insulation fiasco is the latest in a string of programs that have either failed or become bogged down in the implementation phase and comes amid concerns among some senior bureaucrats of a lack of consultation from the government as policies are developed.

*Continued on Page 4*

# Staff left burnt by Rudd workload

*Continued from Page 1*

Earlier this month, the Australian National Audit Office detailed how \$17 million of taxpayers money was wasted when Communications Minister Stephen Conroy ignored warnings of the risks of sticking with his original timetable for the establishment of the national broadband network.

Government promises on childcare drop-off centres in school grounds, construction of GP super clinics and cutting business red tape have all had slow starts. These are on top of the decision to scrap GroceryChoice last year, criticism of the Fuel Watch site in 2008 and complaints from some schools about the rigid nature of the Building the Education Revolution program.

Peter Shergold, a secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in the Howard government, this week said it was an "extraordinary challenge" to run

service delivery programs from Canberra.

Asked about the failed insulation program, he said: "I think they established pretty good administration guidelines. But then Canberra obviously found it very difficult to enforce them."

Professor Shergold told *The Weekend Australian* yesterday that to have made the program work the department would need to have developed a network of providers to deliver it and a strong partnership with states.

John Wannam, of Australian National University, said the commonwealth had increasingly moved since the 1960s and 1970s into areas that were previously the realm of the states.

Federal governments made announcements "before they've really thought through the detailed implementation issues and what might go wrong", he said.

"There are a lot of areas the commonwealth is involved in now where they really don't have a lot of hands-on information," Professor Wanna said.

Earlier this week on Radio National Professor Shergold said implementation was the key to government policy. He said it was better for a government to have no policy than to announce one with fanfare and then be unable to deliver on it.

Professor Shergold, who now runs the Centre for Social Impact at the University of NSW, said the real problem was that people charged with implementing programs "don't have the power to... influence in a significant way the policy decisions that are made".

And he warned that this had potential political consequences.

"There is a tendency to be over-ambitious in one's goals and clearly that can bring a govern-

ment unstuck," Professor Shergold said.

"I think that failure to implement one's announced policies well over time starts to undermine you. People start to lose confidence and start not to listen to what you are saying."

But Nadine Flood, the deputy national secretary of the Commonwealth Public Sector Union, said relations with the government were "generally pretty good" and many public servants were proud of the job they did during the global financial crisis.

She said the role the federal public service was asked to play as the government rolled out its fiscal stimulus package was unprecedented and generally they did a good job. "The ask was a significant one. Mostly we rolled it out and it worked."