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- Monday 13 February 2023 - <https://www.abc.net.au/qanda/2023-13-02/101944784>
- Thursday 10 November 2022 - <https://www.abc.net.au/qanda/2022-10-11/101611634>
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Copies of these transcripts are also attached.

Additionally, attached you'll find transcripts from the mentioned appearances on Afternoon Briefing.



**THE HON DR ANNE ALY MP**  
**MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**  
**MINISTER FOR YOUTH**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**&OE TRANSCRIPT**

**Q&A**

**MELBOURNE, ABC WITH STAN GRANT**

**MONDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2023**

***SUBJECTS: ChatGPT; Inflation; Cost of living***

**STAN GRANT:** (SPEAKS WIRADJURI) In my language, I want to pay respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, on whose land we are meeting here tonight, and send my love and respects to the members of the Stolen Generations, on this anniversary of the Apology. Tonight, who do you trust in a world that feels increasingly out of our control, whether it's the Reserve Bank upping interest rates, Chinese spy balloons or artificial intelligence that may make us redundant? Joining our panel, British journalist and host of the News Agents podcast, Jon Sopel. Greens senator for WA, Dorinda Cox, who was, today, appointed the party's First Nations spokesperson. Liberal Member for Menzies and Afghanistan veteran Keith Wolahan. Minister for Youth and Early Childhood Education Anne Aly. and Professor of Artificial Intelligence at UNSW, Toby Walsh. Can we take back control?

A very energetic audience tonight. Thank you for that lovely welcome. I'm Stan Grant. It's great to be with you. Now, remember, you can livestream us around the country on iview and all the socials. #QandA is the hashtag, and later we'll be discussing artificial intelligence, which is the subject of our online poll tonight. This is what we're asking.

**TITLE:** *Are you concerned about the increasing presence of artificial intelligence in our everyday lives?*

**STAN GRANT:** Now you can cast your votes on our Facebook and Twitter accounts, and we'll bring you those results a bit later. Let's get started with our first question tonight, from Allison Troth.

**ALLISON TROTH:** Inflation and cost of living is not just the elephant in the room – it is an entire herd. Conversations with my friends are focusing on negotiating extra casual shifts or how we can join the gig economy just to pay the kids' school expenses or their sports fees, let alone the mortgage. So, where's the hope?

**STAN GRANT:** Anne Aly.

**ANNE ALY, MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & YOUTH:** Thanks, Stan. Allison, is it? Thank you so much for your question, Allison. Look, I'm not going to sugar-coat it. And the Treasurer has...certainly hasn't sugar-coated it either. Inflation is rising, and interest rates are rising, and cost of living pressures on families and individuals, right across Australia, is really being felt. I've got to say, though, that I've spent pretty much my entire

parliamentary career standing up in Parliament, talking about cost-of-living pressures for some sections of the people that I represent in Cowan, particularly in those lower socioeconomic suburbs. So, I think that those people have been feeling the cost-of-living pressures much more acutely, now, and for longer. But there is hope, as the Treasurer has said. He believes, and he has said this, that inflation has hit its highest point. And, you know, we're doing things. We're doing...where we can, we're offering cost-of-living relief, whether it be in my area of more affordable early childhood education and care, or in other areas of relief. We're doing things to repair the economy. We're introducing the Manufacturing Fund to reinvigorate manufacturing in Australia, diversify our economy, create more jobs in manufacturing. And we're repairing the budget, as well. So, you know, I know it's tough. I know it's tough. The other day, I was at the shops, and I think, you know, just observing a gentleman there who was buying bread and was counting his coins to buy the bread, and how much, how expensive the bread was. Like, I remember those days from when I was a single mum, but to see people in some of my wealthier suburbs doing that, it really does hit home.

**STAN GRANT:** And here's the thing, Anne, you can't look at Allison and tell her that interest rates are not going to continue to go up because the Reserve Bank sets them, and you don't have control over that.

**ANNE ALY:** We don't have control over what the Reserve Bank sets. It's an independent body and...and...and they set it. You know, I will say that the banks are being hauled in and questioned about their rates rises. But, you know, there's no sugar-coating it, Allison. There's none.

**STAN GRANT:** Keith Wolahan, you may be looking here and thinking, "Gee, we're not in government. We dodged a bullet here," because inflation was moving and interest rates were moving as your government, the previous government, was coming to an end, as well. So, this was coming, regardless of who was going to be in power, wasn't it?

**KEITH WOLAHAN, LIBERAL MEMBER FOR MENZIES:** Well, you've got to look at it about how it affects families. So, in my seat, in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, families are doing it really tough, and soon we'll have a by-election in the seat of Aston. And so, if you look at an average mortgage in Aston, in Bayswater, in Rowville, a \$750,000 mortgage, a family will be paying \$18,000 more this year. Now, that's after tax. So, you need to have an increase in your wages of about \$24,000. Now...

**STAN GRANT:** Mm. And that's not happening.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** ...that's massive. So, families, if you're a teacher on \$85,000, or a store manager on \$72,000, that money is not sitting there, and your boss is not going to just give it to you. So, you're going to have to cut other discretionary spending, whether it's school excursions, food, heating. So, this affects real people's lives. So, Stan, there is a political element, but I'm actually genuinely worried. In my seat, there are six food banks and those queues are out the door. And often...I just spoke about families where two people are earning an income, but when there's a divorce or someone dies, and you've got that mortgage to pay, I see mums with kids in the car begging for food. So, this is something we should all lean in and help and try and fix it.

**STAN GRANT:** And, Dorinda, when it comes to this, the Greens are in the same situation. This...to a large extent, how captive is Australia to pressures beyond our control, whether it be a war in Ukraine, rising inflation elsewhere, increasing interest rates in the United States, which ultimately flows through and exports inflation to other parts of the world, as well? This is something that was going to hit us. How do you protect the most vulnerable?

**DORINDA COX, GREENS SENATOR FOR WA:** Well, I think you...you... You know, the excuses have been thick and fast, both from current government and previous. And I think the thing that we can look to is stage three tax cuts. Like, that is something the government can do. And, you know, we know the global pressures, but everyday Australians are feeling the cost-of-living pressures. There are rent freezes, there are putting dental and mental health into Medicare, there's raising the income support above the poverty line – there are very real things that the government can concurrently do to ease those cost-of-living pressures.

**STAN GRANT:** I might just go back to Anne very quickly on that because this has been... The stage three tax cuts has been an ongoing issue, and there's been calls for the government to walk away from this because, ultimately, it would put a lot more money into the hands of wealthier people. Are you prepared to do that and look at redirecting that to support lower-income people?

**ANNE ALY:** Well, I think those stage three tax cuts aren't due to come in for a couple of years anyway. So, you know, looking at real relief now, I think, is...is an issue. And that's some of the things that we're putting in place now – real relief, right now, when it really, really matters. But we also have to ensure that the things that we do don't add more pressure on inflation. And Jim Chalmers has spoken about this very lucidly, about, you know, ensuring that the relief that we do and the measures that we take don't actually add more inflationary pressure. Yes, wages need to rise. And, you know, let's face it, we've had 10 years of stagnant wages. And we've done...we've put in IR measures. Tony Burke has introduced, last year, measures in to reform the IR system, to ensure that some of our lowest-paid workers can get pay rises. But, you know, all of those things individually aren't going to help, but collectively, they can afford families, they can afford individuals some...some relief.

**STAN GRANT:** And we are talking about families who are caught in the crosshairs. And, Allison, you raised this. Let's...I want to bring in Amy Foy, who is going to join us from Padstow in New South Wales. Amy, thank you for joining us on the program. I want to ask you about your situation and what the increase in interest rates has meant for you, in terms of what you are paying now, the money you have to find that you didn't have to find before.

#### **AMY FOY, PADSTOW, NSW**

Yeah. Thanks, Stan. Hi, panel. It's absolutely right. So, you know, when we first financed our home, because of the very small amount that we had, you know, initially, to put down for it, we had to split our loan into half-fixed, or a lot more fixed and a lot less variable. And so, you know, with all of this increasing, we've recently refinanced the last 12 months, 18 months or so, which has meant an additional 20% in our mortgage repayments, monthly for us. And then, our fixed rate, which is due to expire at the end of this year, towards the beginning of next year, which is our largest chunk, at current interest rates, we're looking at, additionally, \$500 a week on our initial loan, which we, you know...

**STAN GRANT:** \$500 a week? And so where does that come from? What do you cut back on?

**AMY FOY:** (CHUCKLES) Well, everything, Stan. You know, it's nice to hear that we're trying to do things. But when you have two children, \$150 doesn't go very far.

**STAN GRANT:** Mm.

**AMY FOY:** When it costs you \$800 for... This is in a public school, for school uniforms, just to get us set up for summer. So, you know, I see little things happening, but at the end of the

day, you know, I can't earn any more. My capacity is what it's at. So is my partner – he works shift work. My children are too young to work. So, what do we do?

**STAN GRANT:** And one of the things, Amy, to do, I suppose, is you have to look at the reality, and people are going to face this, of potentially having to sell your homes. Are you at that point yet?

**AMY FOY:** We are considering it, Stan. You know, when our interest, when our fixed rate comes up in the next 12 months, when we can't afford an additional \$500 a week, we actually really don't know what we're going to do. You know, living in South West Sydney, we can't even rent a place. And, you know, I've talked to my husband about it a lot over the last 12 months, and he says we couldn't even sell this house to buy another one. So, it's not...we're in a very, you know, tough position right now.

**STAN GRANT:** So, what's the question you would like to put...to put to our panel?

**AMY FOY:** Look, so I guess it's twofold. I mean, who is responsible for making these decisions that put so much strain on family life? And if you're saying the Reserve Bank's independent, they have so much power to control my life – it's incredible. And why is interest rates the focus of slowing the economy? Surely, there's other things that we can do.

**STAN GRANT:** I want to go to the politicians in a moment, but I'll bring Jon in now, because, Jon, you've observed this in other parts of the world, as well. This is a phenomenon that's been sweeping through the world, and real people are getting hurt.

**JON SOPEL, HOST, THE NEWS AGENTS PODCAST:** Yeah. And I don't think it's going to be much comfort to any of you if I say that inflation is 7.8%, I think, in Australia. It's 9.2% in the UK. Interest rates are 3.5% here. They're 4% in the UK. And it's going to be really uncomfortable for huge numbers of people. I don't think that people kind of, you know... The basic concept of inflation everyone gets – if it costs more to fill your car and more to fill the grocery trolley, and you've got the same amount of money or declining money, then you're worse off, and everyone is feeling worse off. The thing about interest rates is that, I mean, what happened in the UK and happened here, I suspect, is that banks were given the task of taking politics out of interest-rate decisions so that they can only do one thing, which is raise or cut interest rates. In Britain, we had an experiment with cutting taxes when Liz Truss was the Prime Minister. It didn't go very well.

**STAN GRANT:** For five minutes, yeah.

**JON SOPEL:** She took the economy over the edge of a cliff and she was gone within seven weeks, became the shortest time of a prime minister in British history. So I think that there are no easy answers. And it's true in America and it's true in Britain, it's true in Europe, and there are real pressures. The only thing I would say that, you know, looking at the latest stats coming out of the US is that they feel they've turned the corner, that inflation has peaked, that there will not be the same need for aggressive interest rate rises. And I guess that's a small crumb of comfort. But if you're struggling to pay the mortgage and pay the food bills.

**STAN GRANT:** Or sell your house, or sell your house. Anne, the question is, why interest rates? Is that the only means of being able to slow inflation? Because it's a blunt instrument we know and it hurts the most vulnerable.

**ANNE ALY:** Well, as I said, the Reserve Bank makes its decisions independently. And, you know, I know that there is some controversies around the Reserve Bank governor, but his term comes up in September.

**STAN GRANT:** Are you saying that you want him gone in September?

**ANNE ALY:** No, no, I'm not saying that at all. I actually, you know, that's something that's not even in my portfolio. So that's something for the Treasurer and the Government more broadly to decide. Look, I think there are, there are so many global headwinds at the moment and we live in some really, really uncertain economic times. And I know that, you know, like Jon said, nothing that, that I say is going to ease that pressure off people who are experiencing this. I think \$500 increase a week. I just think that's, that's, that's crazy. That's just phenomenal. And I really feel for you, having been in that situation myself, where I've had to scrimp and save to put food on the table. I really feel it acutely, that pain that people are feeling both in my electorate and across Australia. What I can say is, as Jon has said, you know, despite all of these global headwinds, the Treasurer has said that he believes that inflation has peaked and that, you know, we can, we can look forward to the future. I think there is, there is, there is a glimmer of optimism there and that, you know, things will get better once more of our cost of living relief measures come into play. Like, I don't know if you use early childhood education at all for your two children, but there will be some relief there for the fees for early childhood education. And, you know, I know it feels like empty words coming from a politician. But take it from somebody who is a single mum and who's been through that as well and who's lived in poverty, that I know that nothing we say is going to make it better for you.

**STAN GRANT:** Hands up who'd like to see the Reserve Bank governor here answering some questions about it. Yes. We have asked Philip Lowe to come on the program twice. We're yet to get him. We'll keep asking.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** Stan...

**STAN GRANT:** Can I bring you back in a moment? I want to go to Toby. Because, Toby, there are other options, aren't there, in terms of interest rates and mortgages and locking people in for longer at lower rates?

**TOBY WALSH, PROFESSOR OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, UNSW:** It is. In Australia we're actually, we're much more exposed than in other countries like the United States. In the United States, if you take a mortgage out, you take out a 30-year term, fixed-rate mortgage. You know exactly what you're going to be up for when you take that mortgage out. There is no shock. Only a third of our mortgages are fixed-rate and half of those fixed-rate, those fixed-rate mortgages, this year will end and people will face the sort of bill shock that you talk about – over \$1,000 a month, some people even \$2,000 a month. That is a big risk. If we want to encourage people to become homeowners, then removing that uncertainty, giving us the certainty of fixing our mortgages. I refixed my mortgage last year. The longest possible you could get is five years. You can't get a long... long fixed mortgage. That adds to our problems. It makes us much more exposed. And what I worry about is if we have many more interest rate rises, we're going to go into recession, an unnecessary recession.

**STAN GRANT:** I'll get a quick comment from you, Keith.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** So the Reserve Bank governor, we'll be putting questions, we'll put questions to him. He'll be at the Senate on Wednesday and I'm on the House Economics Committee and we'll be asking him questions on Friday.

**STAN GRANT:** I think they'd like to ask the questions, wouldn't you?

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** Of course. And we'll be asking on your behalf.

**ANNE ALY:** Get your questions in now!

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** Please do. But there's two levers here. Monetary policy is one lever, and it is blunt and it hurts people, but it's a necessary one. The other one is fiscal policy...

**STAN GRANT:** Which is spending.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** ..which is the role for government, and it's about reducing spending. Labor and Liberal need to reduce spending in government and it brings inflation down and it helps people. You can't have one foot on the accelerator and one foot on the brake, and currently that's what we're doing. The IMF has warned against that. We have \$45 billion from this government in off-market spending. That's inflationary and it's not good enough and it's going to hurt people.

**STAN GRANT:** Amy, I want to thank you... Thank you for your question, Amy. Good luck to you. Good luck to your family. I hope things go well for you. Thank you again.

**AMY FOY:** Thank you. Thanks, panel.

**STAN GRANT:** Thanks, Amy. There's a lot to get through tonight. Let's bring in Dennis Fitzgerald now with his question. Dennis.

**DENNIS FITZGERALD:** Was the Chinese air balloon full of hot air or was it a serious attempt to find out what they could get away with before the Americans took action?

**STAN GRANT:** I might go to you, Toby, on that.

**TOBY WALSH:** (CHUCKLES) Well, I didn't think I was ever going to be talking about UFOs on national TV, but here I am! The best explanation I've heard for this, actually, is that the US were looking for faster-moving objects. They were looking for jets and satellites. And so it was only when they started, when the Chinese sent over a spy balloon that was so big – the first one was as big as a bus – that it was actually first seen by people on a commercial aeroplane that they actually turned the dial down and started looking at slower-moving objects, which is why now we've had, at the last count, four of them seen in the last few days. I don't think it's technically very interesting in the sense that they're getting information that they haven't been able to get by other means. But I think it says something very profound about the...our relationship with China and how that's changing.

**STAN GRANT:** Jon.

**JON SOPEL:** I mean, there's a lot of speculation in the States at the moment that this is extraterrestrials, aliens. I'm going to say that if they managed to get through solar storms, meteor storms, into the earth's atmosphere, have travelled across galaxies, I don't reckon an F-16 plane is going to take it down. So I kind of think there's got to be a more logical explanation for what on earth has happened. But, you know, you're hearing about these objects and they're not calling them balloons. I mean, I think the head of the kind of air defence systems in America said, "I'm not calling them balloons for a reason." They have no propulsion system. It does sound decidedly odd. It sounds just like the start of Independence Day, and we're waiting for Will Smith to come in and take them out. But I mean, there has got to be some explanation. But I think the point about China that you raise is a serious one, because I think that, I think China is testing and looking at weaknesses and looking at vulnerabilities and thinking that maybe we can do this. And it seems odd when there are satellites circling the globe and there are all sorts of ways of gathering intelligence that you need to do this. But I think that the politicians in the West are right to take it seriously.

**DORINDA COX:** I think, you know, in Australia we have a very prominent and very important independent position that we should play, particularly in relation to the US and China. And we should be looking within our diplomatic relations to really looking at keeping peace in our region. And I think it's an important conversation that we need to be having as a nation.

**STAN GRANT:** Yeah. It does... It does lead us to our next question as well, which is talking about this question of security in our region from Brenda McMinn.

**BRENDA MCMINN:** Sorry. Well, I'm 83 years old, a former British subject, and I've lived through all the wars since 1939. I was born at the beginning of 1939. Since wars are becoming more and more destructive and never seem to achieve a better world, do we need a pact tying us to the US and the UK – AUKUS? Will Australia be obliged to follow either of these two countries into yet even more conflict?

**STAN GRANT:** Anne.

**ANNE ALY:** Thank you, Brenda. It's lovely to see you here. Thank you for the question. I think there is an important role for collective security. And historically, if you look at attempts at collective security, many of them have failed because of differences in values and an assumption of universal values...universal kind of values around security. I think for Australia it's important that we do have alliances with the US and with the UK that would help us in security and in defence matters. It's an important alliance for Australia and one that we need to pursue. But that doesn't preclude us from also pursuing, as Dorinda suggested, security and peace in our region. And Penny Wong has been incredibly active as the Foreign Minister going out there and, in the Pacific, Indonesia even, you know, resetting our ties with China even, or the ways in which we relate with China. There is a huge part for us to play in our region, but there is also an importance for us to maintain a security alliance with like-minded countries.

**STAN GRANT:** Sorry, Anne, but that's trying to walk both sides of the street, and at certain points...

**ANNE ALY:** Why? How is that...?

**STAN GRANT:** Well, OK, here's an example.

**ANNE ALY:** Mm.

**STAN GRANT:** We hear this a lot. If there was a conflict over Taiwan tomorrow, you wouldn't be walking two sides of the street, and there are choices to be made. So, while you're building closer relationships with China right now, inevitably, choices are made about where Australia's interests are served. Are they more served by closer ties to the UK and the US than they are in ties with China?

**ANNE ALY:** Well, I don't think it's about building more closer ties with China. I think that's kind of misconstruing the relationship here. I think we do have a very strong trade relationship with China. I mean, let's face it – we rely on China for a lot of the products that we use every day. I'm not saying it's a good thing or a bad thing. I do think that we need to build our sovereign capability more, and we're certainly working on that, and Ed Husic has done some amazing work in that space, and we need to be more independent, but we do have... China is an important trading partner for Australia. That doesn't mean that we can't call out China on human rights abuses. That doesn't mean that, you know, we can't have the kind of relationship or diplomatic ties with China that allow us to still maintain our sovereignty and our security, and the security of our region, Stan. You know, like, you can have a friend,

but be able to be very frank with that friend and, you know, have that friendship on your terms.

**STAN GRANT:** Keith, that's not often how China responds, though, and, of course, we've seen China take trade sanctions against Australia when it doesn't like decisions that are made. Now we see Australia taking out Chinese-supplied cameras from defence installations because of concerns about spying.

**ANNE ALY:** We should be building our own cameras.

**STAN GRANT:** So, how do we manage this moment, Keith?

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** I think, to the question, Brenda... I've served in war. I was in Afghanistan three times. I would never wish that on anyone else or my children, so I'm not in the business of starting wars. We're in the business of preventing wars. And weakness is provocative, so it's in our interests to form alliances, especially with likeminded democracies, because democracies are being threatened by autocracies around the world. And I ask you to look at two examples. The end of the Afghanistan War, which was tragic. That sent a signal that contributed to the invasion by Russia of Ukraine. It sent a signal of weakness. But then you look at the people of Ukraine and what they're doing – standing up to the Russian invasion – that is sending a signal to the region, one that I think will bring us peace in this region. So, it's important that we show strength and that we stand with allies who are democracies.

**JON SOPEL:** Brenda, it's such a good question because, obviously, people feel that, you know, "if only we could just do things easily." If you look at Northern Europe, where the Second World War was largely fought, where my father served as a service...you know, was in the war... NATO, which was formed in 1948, has sort of kept the peace – not perfectly, but sort of kept the peace ever since then. And so alliances are not just a way of kind of protecting yourself. They enhance your own sovereignty because they reduce the risk that any one country will attack you. And I know that that is what the architects of AUKUS... And I was the BBC's North America editor when it got signed, and the French suddenly pulled their ambassador out of Washington, which seemed an extraordinary thing to do. But it does seem interesting, what has happened. And Australia plays a vital role in the Five Eyes agreement. And, you know, I was endlessly asked to talk about the special relation...

**STAN GRANT:** This is the intelligence sharing agreement.

**JON SOPEL:** Yeah, the intelligence sharing agreement between Australia, New Zealand, Britain, Canada and the US. And the US really value that, and that is really important towards national security as well. So, cooperation, I think, if you look over history, has helped us and helped stop wars, not start them.

**STAN GRANT:** I'm not sure Brenda's entirely convinced. Are you, Brenda?

**JON SOPEL:** No, she doesn't look convinced.

**BRENDA MCMINN:** I... Well, over the past 50 years or so, we've been drawn into wars by the US. The US took us into, you know, Vietnam and into all these other places. Is this going to happen again? This is what I'm saying. If we have a pact with them and they dec...and the US decides – not us, the US decides – that they're going to go into a war, do we follow, like we've done before?

**STAN GRANT:** I'll go to Dorinda.

**DORINDA COX:** Yeah, great... Thank you, Brenda. And you've articulated that so beautifully. And what I was going to say is that what is extremely obvious – and Anne actually mentioned it – was about our sovereign capability. We do not have the infrastructure here in Australia to support nuclear submarines. That is obvious. We are getting into an arrangement and into a relationship – an ongoing relationship – with the US because we don't have that sovereign capability. We are actually creating a rod for our own back, so you're exactly right in what you're saying. And we absolutely... I mean, the Greens have always had a policy about no nuclear and no nuclear subs, and we will continue to stand by that. So, I think we have to...

**STAN GRANT:** Thank you, Brenda. I know Toby... Toby's got a bit to say about AI and weapons, and we're going to come to that a little bit later. But if you're joining us...just joining us now, you're watching Q+A. And, of course, we're live with Jon Sopel, Dorinda Cox, Keith Wolahan, Anne Aly, and Toby Walsh. Let's get to another topic now. Here's James Mason.

**JAMES MASON:** Oh, hi, all. Hi, panel. I'm just wondering if ChatGPT, I'm wondering if that can help me pick the Melbourne Cup winner. And if so, how much should I bet on it?

**STAN GRANT:** There might be people like me scratching their heads and going, "ChatGPT?" Toby, what is it?

**TOBY WALSH:** Well, it could have been better named. It's the latest super-duper chat bot. It's an interface that you can have a conversation with. You can ask it questions. You can ask it to write an MP's speech or compose you a poem in the style of Shakespeare – whatever you would like. You could ask it, as you suggest, "Who's going to win the Melbourne Cup?" I've got bad news for you. It was only trained on data up to 2021, so it has no idea who's going...

**STAN GRANT:** So, it'll tell you who won the last two years, but...

**TOBY WALSH:** It won't even tell you who won last year's Melbourne Cup, so it's not omnipotent, but it's certainly an eye-opening moment. It's one of those moments... I saw the first demo of it and I was reminded of when I saw the very first browser in '93 and I thought, "OK, that's how..." I'd been using the internet for many years, but that's how all of us are going to be able to access the internet. I remember when I saw the first iPhone. Steve Jobs demoed the first iPhone in 2007. I thought, "That's amazing. That's how we're all going to have these computers in our hands." And when I saw the first demo of this, I thought, "OK, that's a future. That's our future. When we're going to have conversations with computers, we're going to talk to them and they're going to be somewhat intelligent." It's still got a lot of limitations and bugs, and we've still got a long way to go, but it was one of those moments where you saw a vision of the future.

**STAN GRANT:** Is that the future we want, Anne?

**ANNE ALY:** I'm going to tell you something because I've got a confession to make, and that confession is that I did not get my husband anything for Valentine's Day, so I asked ChatGPT...to come up with a message, and this was the message that it came up with.

**TOBY WALSH:** On national TV.

**ANNE ALY:** "Happy Valentine's Day, Dave. You are loved and appreciated today and every day. Wish you all the happiness and love in the world."

**STAN GRANT:** Straight from the heart!

**ANNE ALY:** I would never say that! There is no way on Earth I would ever say anything like that. So, it's not sentient. It doesn't capture human emotion.

**JON SOPEL:** Are you going to give Dave his message?

**ANNE ALY:** No, no. My message for Dave is, "Roses are red, violets are blue I'm not very romantic That is true I forgot to get you a card today So I'm giving you a shout-out on Q+A."

**STAN GRANT:** She hadn't planned that either! She had not planned that!

**ANNE ALY:** No AI involved in that at all!

**STAN GRANT:** I felt like we needed a backing track – you know, a little... But, seriously, Keith, there are concerns here. It's been banned in some places. Should we be looking at banning it?

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** Well, I'm not, as a Liberal, into banning things, unless there's good reason.

**STAN GRANT:** We won't go there. I can just imagine the conversations people are having in their heads right now.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** For good reason. But history was made in the Parliament this week. A good friend of mine and neighbour, Aaron Violi, delivered the first AI-generated speech in the Parliament. And today I took him out of Question Time and said, "Is there anything you'd like to say?" And he said, "It really scared me because it seemed so real." And that comes back to the question you had, Brenda – that does worry me about the future of warfare. And that might be another question...

**STAN GRANT:** It is.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:**...Stan, but, you know, there's... We can't really... Aaron said, "We can't really trust what we see and hear anymore." And so when you see ChatGPT and then you look at those videos with Boston Dynamics, I'm worried about those two things meeting each other and what that means for our future. When you look at nuclear weapons in 1945, it took 20 years for us to have a regime of control, and we're still working on that. So, the regulatory lead time is really long, but this is moving so quickly.

**JON SOPEL:** I was with a very senior executive from Meta, which owns Facebook and WhatsApp and Instagram, and they are spending, next year, US\$34 billion just on research, largely on AI. And when the whole question of ChatGPT came up, this guy said to me, "This is the foothills of what you're looking at." What AI is going to be able to do in the future is frankly terrifying. I do think there's an irony, though, that, you know, AI has been encroaching on factory-floor jobs, has been encroaching on call-centre jobs. Now that it could do politicians out of work and journalists out of work...

**STAN GRANT:** Oh, yes!

**JON SOPEL:** ..we're suddenly quite concerned about this!

**STAN GRANT:** But let's go with... Let's stay with AI. A question now from Joan Barlow.

**JOAN BARLOW:** Oh, a question for you, Toby Walsh. I very recently read an article in which it described a situation in which AI was unexpectedly found to be very proficient in designing a lethal new nerve agent.

**STAN GRANT:** Hmm.

**JOAN BARLOW:** Is it possible for designers using AI to ever anticipate such potentially lethal outcomes? And if they do...what to do if such outcomes are discovered?

**TOBY WALSH:** Thank you. That's a really interesting question. Unfortunately, if you can get... The original program was designed to come up with nice chemicals, useful chemicals, and then they just turned it around and said, "Well, OK, let's ask the opposite question. Can you design something that's quite dangerous?" And it was actually very effective at designing some recognised nerve agents, and that is the consequence of... AI is entirely dual-use. There are positive uses and, often, the very same algorithms can be put to very negative uses, and it's how...

**STAN GRANT:** Like human beings.

**TOBY WALSH:** Like human beings, yes. But an added complication is the unexpected consequences that we often cannot predict, we can't see. In that case, we've seen a few things like that in the past. It was possible. I mean, they asked a very specific question. The fact they asked the question, they knew that it was possible. But the unexpected consequences... And we see this at scale with companies like Meta because we've never had a technology before where you can touch a billion people overnight. And even smaller effects – even smaller effects – on our social media that can polarise us, that can change our political debate, can have really profound impacts and can then end up with changing the outcome of an election, as we possibly saw in the US, or change the outcome of a referendum, as we saw with Brexit. There are very profound consequences of this technology and we have to think very carefully.

**STAN GRANT:** What do we do, Dorinda?

**DORINDA COX:** I think what... You know, this is ever-evolving, and evolving very, very rapidly. And I agree with Keith's comment around the regulatory framework that this needs to sit within. What I also think is really important to acknowledge is the data that you input into that. It's only as good as that, right? Like, it can only be as good as the human data that's being put into it. But also we all have that experience of being unsafe on the internet and I think reinforcing some of those structural disadvantages, such as facial recognition – that's already been proven, it's well held as a view. And we have to understand that disadvantaged groups, whether it's gender, race and others, are going to be heightened in this evolution of AI in the future.

**STAN GRANT:** I want to come back... I want to come back to you, Joan, in just a moment, 'cause you work in education. So, I want to come back to you on how this affects education. But, Keith, as someone who served in war, and Toby's touched on the consequences of this... We see this with drone warfare now as well, where people can be killed without ever having to look into their eyes, robot armies, which don't make human calculations, human decisions, that are indefatigable. They'll just march and fight to beyond exhaustion 'cause they don't get exhausted. What does it mean for the battlefield and what does it mean for warfare?

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** It's a very good question. So, there was a study done on the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, I think around 2014, and 90% of the civilian casualties were in error –

human error. And so, humans, we made mistakes. And you're right – the further you are from the battlefield in an aircraft or operating a drone, the more likely you'll make a mistake. And I saw it. I saw times when there was a drone that looked like someone was carrying an explosive, and then, on further investigation, they were carrying a baby. And you need a human there to make those sort of calculations because I don't trust an algorithm to show compassion and humanity, even when all the boxes are ticked to engage, and we need more of that.

**STAN GRANT:** Joan, for education, and we talked about... We talked about ChatGPT, and that can do your homework, apparently, as well. If only! If only it was around... What are the consequences for education, as you see it, from AI?

**JOAN BARLOW:** Well, I'm not so worried about cheating in education, to be honest. I'm more concerned about the deeper issue. I played around with ChatGPT yesterday, asking wonderful questions. And I'm teaching Nietzsche on Friday. People who might know...

**STAN GRANT:** Nietzsche and ChatGPT opens up all sorts of possibilities! But he did say...he did say God was dead, and maybe that's what artificial intelligence means!

**JOAN BARLOW:** But it blew my mind because...'cause I asked the question, "What would Nietzsche think of AI?"

**STAN GRANT:** Hmm.

**JOAN BARLOW:** And this wonderful answer came back, and it made me really reflect on...really, what does it mean – this is getting a bit philosophic, I know – but, really, our humanness? And if we've got these large language models, and they can produce this wonderful stuff... Not like your poor Dave. I feel for him! ..really, what does it mean...? What happens to our creativity? Or what could happen to human creativity, our individuality, our real sense of being human, really, if there's this huge model that can produce this amazing stuff? It blew my mind...

**STAN GRANT:** Yeah, yeah.

**JOAN BARLOW:** ..really.

**STAN GRANT:** I might throw that one to Jon. Nietzsche and AI, Jon, in 10 seconds?

**JON SOPEL:** I thought there'd be a lot we'd be discussing this evening, but Nietzsche, I didn't... No, no, no. I think it... I think it's really important questions because I think that, actually... Dorinda, what you said is right and sort of not because you've now got machine learning. You've now got machines that are able to learn themselves and decide which way they're going to take themselves. And I just kind of worry that – and putting this in a slightly political context – is that throughout this kind of...the whole internet age, regulation has just simply not been able to keep up with the technological changes that are leaping forward, from Alphabet, from Google, from, you know, Meta and Facebook and all the rest of it. And legislators, whether in Australia, whether in Britain, whether in America, are totally left behind by this.

**STAN GRANT:** So, Anne, just quickly on that... And this is your wheelhouse, of course, because it's early childhood education.

**ANNE ALY:** And there are...there are... This really raises questions about ethics, and the ethics of AI and the responsibility of those who are producing...

**STAN GRANT:** But also regulation. It raises questions about what you're prepared to allow.

**ANNE ALY:** Ethics, regulation. And think about the privacy of your information. Every time you ask the chat bot that question, more and more information is being put into the big data pool from which it pulls. So, there are real ethical and legal questions around this. And you're absolutely right, Jon – we are miles behind where we need to be. And technology is so rapidly evolving that it's almost like the horse has already bolted, right? But on the use of AI for criminal activities and the "bad" use of AI – I've always said criminals are not innovators. They're opportunists. So, whatever technology happens, whatever advances in technology happen, they're going to find ways to exploit that. We need to be building technology with safeguards in place. For example, the cheating thing – why couldn't it have a watermark on it, that if you print out from an...an essay, hand it in, there's a watermark on it that the teacher knows that it's not yours, OK? Me, as a teacher, when I was teaching, when I was a professor, I could tell straightaway if someone's work was...they'd cheated because I insisted that they reference their work absolutely perfectly in Cambridge style. The AI can't do that.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** It can.

**ANNE ALY:** It can reference in Cambridge perfectly, with the right full stop and comma?

**TOBY WALSH:** Yes. Yeah.

**STAN GRANT:** OK! OK! Listen, at this point...

**ANNE ALY:** Watermark idea!

**STAN GRANT:** At this point, I'm going to bring you the results of our online poll. Now, we asked you – are you concerned about the increasing presence of artificial intelligence in our everyday lives?

And... Can I see? Someone's got their head in front of the screen and I can't...

**TITLE:** *Are you concerned about the increasing presence of artificial intelligence in our everyday lives?*

Yes 57%

No 31%

Unsure 12%

**STAN GRANT:** There we go. 57% yes, 31% no, and 12% unsure. But, Toby, it's here. That's the reality. And just to quote Nietzsche, Nietzsche did say, "Who are we to erase the horizon?" If you erase the horizon, what are the consequences of this? This is here, isn't it?

**TOBY WALSH:** Yeah, it is. And I'm really pleased by that poll because it says that... that people are waking up to the idea that AI's going to be part of their lives. It's not just part of, you know, geeks like me who are...

**ANNE ALY:** It already is.

**TOBY WALSH:** It's already part of your lives. And that's something we should be worried about. There's great opportunity. Those same tools can be perfect personal tutors to people.

They can provide, you know... We had the Grattan report saying, you know, we need to provide \$1 billion worth of personal tutoring to help disadvantaged children. Well, here is a tool that can provide that at much less cost, possibly. And that we get to choose the future that we want, and we obviously have to demand that of our politicians.

**STAN GRANT:** And we don't get them to write Valentine's Day cards! That's the lesson!

**ANNE ALY:** Really bad advice.

**TOBY WALSH:** Technology is not destiny. Society gets to change technology as much as technology changes society. And it's all about us making the right choices, sitting in places like this, deciding what is the future we want to have?

**DORINDA COX:** And I don't think that's actually in the future. I think that's here and now.

**ANNE ALY:** It's here and now!

**DORINDA COX:** Robodebt already proved what AI can do for everyday Australians, and I think that we need to have that front of mind. And it is the voluntary principles that people, you know...that use AIs right now...

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah, you have to keep remembering it's not sentient, it's not human. It's based on algorithms.

**STAN GRANT:** Yet that's the... But, look, we could go on all night. I'm going to move on to another topic. Here's Luke Jenner.

**LUKE JENNER:** Thanks, Stan. The BBC has a global reach like no other news outlet. However, it also has its problems – strict impartiality being one – which I assume, Jon, were instrumental in you seeking a new career direction. Nearly a year on from your departure, how do you think the BBC needs to change in the future if it's to maintain its integrity and influence?

**JON SOPEL:** What a great question. Well, thank you for that. I mean, part of the reason I left the BBC – you're right – I thought that they were getting the definition of 'impartiality' wrong, by which I mean... And I think that public broadcasters around the world are struggling with this, whether it's here in Australia or in Britain as well. But, you know, when I was covering Donald Trump at the White House and something that was... "I won the 2020 election." No, you didn't. The votes didn't stack up and there's no... Sometimes, there are issues where there is not, "On the one hand, on the other." "Some people say two plus two is four. Others say two plus two is six. Only time will tell. Jon Sopel, BBC News, Westminster." No! Two plus two is four! And we've got to be able to have the confidence to say that. And I sometimes think that public broadcasters – public service broadcasters – struggle with that a bit and just kind of get themselves tied into knots. And I saw it, I felt, over the Brexit debate.

**STAN GRANT:** Well, I was going to get to that. How did that play out – the idea of impartiality, both sides, in a referendum like Brexit?

**JON SOPEL:** So, there was a false equivalence that took place, whereby you'd say, "Well, some economists say it's going to be a catastrophe for the UK economy. Others say it's going to be great." Actually, nearly every eminent economist said it was going to be bad. And, you know, seven years after the vote on Brexit, it's not going that well. Whereas you had to struggle to find the people who would say, "Brexit is going to be a liberation for the UK economy." And so I sometimes think that we give people a misleading impression in news by

acting as this... I mean, what is the equivalence of...? "Some people say that Ukraine has been badly done by by the invasion of Russia, but others would say..." No! You know, it was wrong. It was a flagrant breach of international law that Russia went across the border of Ukraine. And I think, sometimes, we need to have the boldness to say things. I believe in impartiality, but I think it needs to be a bit more muscular and a bit more aggressive sometimes because there is so much false information out there.

**STAN GRANT:** Just hold that thought, Keith. Just hold that thought for the moment, Keith, 'cause I do want to go to Dorinda because... Jon raised the impact of media coverage and impartiality on Brexit, and I'm just wondering... We're facing a referendum this year over the Voice. How are you seeing that play out in the media debate and the way it's being framed around questions of impartiality? Who gets to speak on the other hand, on this hand? How do you think it's impacting it so far?

**DORINDA COX:** Well, I think it's very easy, Stan. And I want to thank Tony for the question. And I think it can be hijacked very, very easily, and I think that... You know, giving a plug for the ABC, the independent – you know, it should be well resourced. It basically creates...such an important platform, and particularly for our mobs in regional, rural and remote areas. You know, having access to that information, being able to get that information that is impartial, that is independent... But also we need to make sure that it's well resourced. And we see that particularly in emergency management and disasters like floods and bushfires. This is why it's so important, it is so critical. And in the Voice context, it's absolutely critical because we need to hear all sides of that to be able to remain impartial.

**STAN GRANT:** Keith?

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** No, thank you for that, and congratulations to Dorinda on her elevation today.

**DORINDA COX:** Thank you. Thank you.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** Look, we are having a referendum here, and I'll take the word 'muscular' that you used about defending what's right. We've got to be very careful about that, and I'll give an example from the US election. And I agree – you know, there was a result and it should be respected by those who didn't succeed. But the Hunter Biden story was put aside as fake news, but it was...

**STAN GRANT:** Joe Biden's son.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** That's right. And it was a legitimate story that should have been aired in the United States, but people decided they shouldn't hear it. We should never have that in a democracy. So, in this coming referendum, I'm really pleased to see that the Albanese government is going to have a pamphlet go out to all households showing a yes and a no case. And no criticism of you, Stan, and the ABC, but I remember once there was a...

**STAN GRANT:** We're big enough to take it, Keith.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** Big enough to take it.

**STAN GRANT:** Go ahead! Take your shot!

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** I remember... You know, long-time viewer, but I remember watching an episode that you did on the Voice, and there was no-one speaking against it. And that's

changed, but we should always trust Australians with hearing both sides of an argument, even on the ABC.

**STAN GRANT:** Sometimes, we ask, and people don't turn up, but you did tonight, Keith, and I thank you for it. We can only speak to the people who will come on. Next, we'll hear from Tony Devereux.

**TONY DEVEREUX:** Thanks, Stan. My question is to Dorinda Cox. I'm on the wrong side of 70, so I've spent 50 years voting in state and federal elections and council elections and so on, and when I go into a polling booth, I'm seldom thinking about individual candidates. I'm always, always thinking about a political party, and I think that's the way most Australians vote and most Australians think when they get to the polling booth...which brings me to wonder – can we improve in the area of...? When a member of Parliament defects from a political party...should we ask them to resign so we can have a by-election? Or perhaps the party they originally represented can choose a candidate from that party that the people voted for at the election.

**DORINDA COX:** Yeah, thanks for your question.

**STAN GRANT:** This is very relevant for the Greens now, of course, after Lidia Thorpe's defection.

**DORINDA COX:** Absolutely. And, Tony, thank you very much. And it's a live issue, particularly for our party. And what I want to say is that democracy is the ability for all Australians to vote in every election. So, whether it's local, state or federal, it's your vote that counts, and you are voting for the values of the party, but also as individuals. So, we've seen a whole lot of teal independents at the last election. So, you were voting, whether it be above the line or below the line, for the party or for the person. So, I don't have a particular view that is wedded to, you know, whether a person should step down, whether they leave that party. I believe that every Australian should be exercising their right to vote. And they are choosing, you know, whether it be Anne's party or Keith's party or my own, in that, based on their values and the way that they operate. And, for us, it's in the policy landscape and sticking to our values, and we're about ensuring that we collaborate and work with grassroots democracy because that's one of the values of our party. And I think what we should see is that people can see themselves reflected in our parliamentarians within...whether it's the federal parliament or the state. And so that's up to us to exercise that, and we have the right to do that, casting our vote.

**STAN GRANT:** Dorinda, in this case, no-one had any...was left in any doubt about what Lidia's position has been throughout and what she campaigned on. She has always spoken very strongly about First Nations sovereignty, so people were in no doubt about that. She has walked away because the party is not honouring, she says, what she believes. What does that mean for your party?

**DORINDA COX:** Well, I think that... Adam Bandt has been very clear that Lidia was able to stay within the party, you know, to exercise her right to campaign on black sovereignty. And I think that that's been a very personal choice of Lidia's, and I respect her decision in relation to that. I now, coming into the First Nations portfolio, will pick up the work now and lead into the future, the important work that we're going to be doing on Voice and referendum. And part of that is also the machinery of the referendum, so I will be looking at ways to increase our First Nations voting, making sure that we are looking at ways that the referendum's being held, and the pamphlet that Keith just talked about. I think they're all important issues that are part of the democracy.

**STAN GRANT:** Anne, I might bring you in on this as well, because there is a question – a fundamental question – that Tony’s raising here, and that is keeping faith with what the people intended when they elected you. If someone leaves the party, should they stay in the Parliament? Should they be able to move to the cross-benches?

**ANNE ALY:** I think it’s different for lower house and Senate. I think more people vote on the lower house... Like, the lower house... When you go to vote in the lower house, you’re voting for the person, and you’ve got a choice of maybe seven candidates. Voting in the Senate, unless you vote below the line, you are voting for the party, right? And that’s how most people vote. Most people vote above the line and they vote for the party. So, I do think that a discussion needs to be had, I mean, about, you know, is this something that the Australian people feel so strongly about that it should be changed, that if you leave your party in the Senate and go to sit on the crossbenches or go to a different party that you’re...? You know, if Australians have voted for your party, they voted for your party. The party chooses who goes on the Senate ticket, right? Right? But in the lower house, you are choosing based on individuals, and it’s reflected in the fact that, you know, for lower house members, there is a lot more campaigning that we do. We do a lot more of the one-on-one, the door-knocking, the personal, because it is about ‘vote for me’. You put yourself as the candidate. Yes, you’re representing a party, but you are the candidate.

**STAN GRANT:** Keith...your view on that?

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** I think Anne made a good point about the difference between the Senate and the House, but we are all guided by the Commonwealth Constitution, and if you open that up, it doesn’t mention political parties, yet we all know, if you’re in the audience or watching at home...

**STAN GRANT:** Or a prime minister.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** That’s right. So, there’s so much for our system that is implied into our Constitution, and that’s important to remember when we go to this referendum later in the year. It would be a cheap shot for Anne or I to have a go at the circumstances of the Greens – we’ve all been there – but I will say this...

**DORINDA COX:** You have.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** We have, yes. We have. But...

**STAN GRANT:** I’ve got a list here! Bob Katter, Mark Latham, Cheryl Kernot...

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** Yeah, yeah, alright! But I’ll say this – Lidia Thorpe is a senator for Victoria, and all Victorians, and that’s her democratic obligation and the people she serves when she’s in the Senate.

**STAN GRANT:** Hmm. We’re going to finish tonight’s discussion with a lovely question from Kabir Mehta.

**KABIR MEHTA:** If you had a choice to invite four political leaders across the globe – past or present – to a dinner party, who would they be and why? President Vladimir Putin’s presence is mandatory.

**STAN GRANT:** Mm!

**ANNE ALY:** Do they have to be alive?

**STAN GRANT:** No, no, no. No, they don't. And Putin is already there.

**ANNE ALY:** Oh, he has to be there.

**STAN GRANT:** He's already there. So, you've got three after Putin. Toby?

**TOBY WALSH:** Well, I'd actually invite Putin and a few other people, like Hitler, and blow up the dinner table.

**STAN GRANT:** Thank you, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

**TOBY WALSH:** Yes.

**STAN GRANT:** Anne?

**ANNE ALY:** Nice question, Kabir. OK, so Putin's already there. I'm going to invite Nawal El Saadawi, who was an Egyptian woman who was an Arab feminist and caused the wave of...the Arab feminism wave. I'm going to invite Malcolm X 'cause I think he's got an interesting story. And Dave...

**JON SOPEL:** Second shout-out.

**ANNE ALY:**...my partner.

**STAN GRANT:** Yeah, she owed Dave big-time.

**TOBY WALSH:** I don't think that's going to work out.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** I'd like to invite Dave as well.

**STAN GRANT:** I think we need to get Dave on the show, is what we need!

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** But I would single out two, so...

**STAN GRANT:** Three. No, you've got... Putin's already there. So, you're eating...

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** I was trying to save you time.

**STAN GRANT:** You're eating with Vladimir Putin.

**KEITH WOLAHAN:** OK. So, I've got Vladimir Putin. Robert Menzies. My seat is named after Robert Menzies. And I'd put this question to him – when you were speaking to the nation in World War II, what prompted you to speak about home ownership, and what would you say about that today? I'd also like to invite Dr Kylie Moore-Gilbert. I thought her courage in a prison in Iran was just phenomenal. And then she's come back here and has spoken so bravely about what's happened in Iran, and I think she's a phenomenal Australian and I'd love to have her there. And then my staff said not to say this, but I'd love to have my mum at a dinner. She'd be very angry if I didn't have her there as well with Dave.

**STAN GRANT:** So, Dorinda?

**DORINDA COX:** I think I'd have to go with Michelle Obama. Like, if you know anything about black women, they're the strong figure behind the man, and Michelle would have been pivotal in Barack Obama's...you know, candidacy.

**STAN GRANT:** I don't know how she'd get along with Vladimir Putin, but...

**DORINDA COX:** Oh, I don't know about that, but I would also... I'd think about Grace Tame. You know, I know Grace, but inviting her to a dinner party would just set that alight. She would be great. And I think my last one would have to be Malcolm X, which I'd have to share with Anne.

**ANNE ALY:** We'd have to share him. We could put Putin in the toilet...take Malcolm out.

**STAN GRANT:** Well, you've interviewed most of them that are alive today, Jon, so I don't know whether you want to go for the ones that you know...

**JON SOPEL:** So, I interviewed Obama, and I then got invited to the Christmas party with Michelle and Barack Obama.

**DORINDA COX:** Wow!

**JON SOPEL:** And we – my wife and I – had our photos taken with them.

**STAN GRANT:** Big-noting here.

**JON SOPEL:** I know! I know! Such a name-dropper! So, we drank champagne. We ate the finest food that the White House chefs had ever prepared. We floated back home to Georgetown in Washington, DC, to our house, where our dog had managed to get up onto the dining-room table, ate all the mince pies, which are full of sultanas and raisins...

**STAN GRANT:** Oh, no!

**JON SOPEL:**...which are deadly for dogs. We had to take the dog to the animal hospital, which, it turns out, it's as expensive for dogs to be treated in the US as human beings! \$2,000 later, the evening lost some of its lustre. So, you know...

**STAN GRANT:** Having dinner with Barack Obama's not always a good idea.

**JON SOPEL:** I'd have Volodymyr Zelenskyy...

**OTHERS:** Ooh!

**JON SOPEL:**...and Putin, probably on opposite sides of the table.

**TOBY WALSH:** A great, long table.

**JON SOPEL:** A very, very long table.

**STAN GRANT:** Then you could, you know, have the peace talks or the...

**JON SOPEL:** Yeah.

**STAN GRANT:** But you've got two other spots.

**JON SOPEL:** OK.

**DORINDA COX:** Not the Obamas!

**JON SOPEL:** I'd have loved to have met Nelson Mandela.

**STAN GRANT:** Which I did, and he lived up to it.

**JON SOPEL:** Did you? Was he...? Lived up to every expectation?

**STAN GRANT:** Lived up to expectation. He'd be on...he'd be on my list. And...?

**JON SOPEL:** And, obviously, Anne, 'cause Dave's not going to go out with her tomorrow night.

**STAN GRANT:** I was thinking... I was thinking a lot about this and, you know, I thought... I mean, if Putin's... I would definitely have Nelson Mandela. I spent a lot of time in China, so I'd like to have Chairman Mao. There are a lot of...

**JON SOPEL:** Yeah.

**STAN GRANT:** There are a lot of questions. And, you know, I would... I would, for a lot of reasons, not all... Pontius Pilate.

**ALL:** Hmm.

**STAN GRANT:** Prelate who rules...

**ANNE ALY:** I think you've thought too much about....

**STAN GRANT:** No, no, no, no, no. Well, I have, but... I don't know. Could you imagine the conversation? Could you imagine the conversation?

**ANNE ALY:** I'm trying.

**STAN GRANT:** Great... Great, um... Great, great question. That's all we have time for. Thanks again to our panel. Dave wasn't here, but...in spirit, it felt like he was! Jon Soper, Dorinda Cox, Keith Wolahan, Anne Aly and Toby Walsh – please thank them.

Thank you for sharing your stories and questions. Next week, we're live again from Melbourne, and joining me will be... This is a good one. Joining me next week – tennis champion and broadcaster Jelena Dokic, communications minister Michelle Rowland, shadow communications minister David Coleman, and youth advocate Imogen Senior. A lot of discussion next week about social media as well, so head to our website to register to be in the audience.

**STAN GRANT:** You've been fantastic tonight. Thank you so much. We've had a laugh as well. Have a good night. Thank you.

**[ENDS]**

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**THE HON DR ANNE ALY MP  
MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
MINISTER FOR YOUTH**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**

**Q&A**

**MELBOURNE, ABC WITH DAVID SPEERS  
THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2022**

***SUBJECTS: Cyber hacks, Syria repatriation***

**DAVID SPEERS:** Tonight, what's worse – paying a ransom to cybercriminals or having your private information published online? Shortly, you'll hear from someone who's lost money to a hacker and from one of Australia's best cyber-experts. Welcome to Q+A.

Hello. I'm David Speers. And here to give you some answers tonight: award-winning author Kamila Shamsie; Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Dan Tehan; Minister for Youth and Early Childhood Education, Anne Aly, who's also a leading counterterrorism expert; cybersecurity expert Alastair MacGibbon, whose firm, CyberCX, has been engaged by Medibank as a strategic adviser; and professor of political history and international security Joe Siracusa. Please, make them all feel welcome.

Also tonight, will Twitter survive under Elon Musk? And is it safe to bring home the Australian families of Islamic State fighters from Syria? And remember, you can livestream us around the country on iView and all the socials. #QandA is the hashtag. Please get involved.

Now, to get us started tonight, here's a question from Emina Besirevic.

**EMINA BESIREVIC:** Medibank has decided not to pay a ransom, despite hackers threatening and following through on the threat to release highly sensitive customer information, which includes abortion records and history of drug and alcohol abuse. Cybersecurity criminals are often from highly sophisticated, highly profitable networks of transnational criminals and rogue states. On the one hand, paying a ransom may encourage more attacks. On the other, not paying a ransom may result in millions of Australians' private information being released. How does the panel propose that government and businesses manage this dilemma when a cybersecurity hack has occurred?

**DAVID SPEERS:** Alastair MacGibbon, let's start with you.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON, CYBERCX CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER:** Oh, thanks. Firstly, can I say that it's truly tragic what has occurred. I'll echo what the Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Cybersecurity has said. It's a dog act. Shameless people, criminals are online. I've spent 20 years or more dealing with these online criminals. There's no good answer to whether or not an organisation should pay an extortion threat. And until someone has walked

in the shoes of an online victim, as in an organisation that's victimised by these criminals, it's really hard for anyone to judge.

Medibank clearly has made a decision not to pay, and that's largely been applauded in the media and by the public. But that's done, I'm sure – and I'm clearly conflicted, as you've said – with a heavy heart. There's no right or wrong answer when these criminals strike. It's a series of least-worst decisions, and Medibank has made a decision. It's our job now as a community, frankly, to wrap ourselves around those victim organisations and more importantly, the victims – you know, millions of people that are affected here, some potentially very significantly.

The more we talk about the specifics of what this criminal has released, the more we're actually giving oxygen to that criminal enterprise. Paying is a legitimate option. It's not illegal. But how do you trust a criminal to return or delete information that has already proven they're a criminal and can't be trusted? So I can understand how the decision is made. And I'll stop in a second. I'd just say that now, the more we talk about the specifics of what information they are dumping on the dark web – hard to find, but still exposing information – the more we're putting pressure on the next lot of organisations that will surely be extorted by these criminals.

**DAVID SPEERS:** It's a really interesting answer, and there's a bit that I want to unpack, and I appreciate that you're a little conflicted – you can't talk too specifically about what's going on at Medibank. You were called in post-event to provide advice to them. But generally, coming back to Emina's question, which is about this conundrum of whether to pay the ransom or not, I think you just said that it is a legitimate option in some cases. So, your advice presumably isn't always just, "Don't pay the ransom".

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Absolutely not.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Why not?

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** I believe in... You want to give organisations the most options kept on the table for as long as possible. So, you have to, by the way, engage... And this might sound crazy to the audience, and I'd love your feedback. You have to engage with the criminals online and ask them what it is they've got. You need to find out what their intentions are. You need to understand the groups they're affiliated with. Because, while it's pretty anarchic online, some groups behave differently to others.

So sometimes it's also buying time so organisations can better communicate with their stakeholders – customers, government, their suppliers, people that rely upon them. So it's never an easy decision to suggest to pay. Ransomware threat actors traditionally lock up computers at the same time as having exfiltrated data. And so the concept of paying to unlock a computer system is fundamentally different to the concept of paying to ask the criminal to delete the data.

Can I add this? The reason why it's still a viable option is we live in a horrendously permissive threat environment. Criminals come up to the door of your house, all of your houses and all of our businesses every day. They don't just rattle the doorknob to see if the door is locked. They'll break into that door. If that was happening offline, you'd all revolt. You'd say it's unacceptable. But online we accept the fact, still today in 2022, that criminals can come up and victimise us. We've got to be careful not to revictimise the organisations and the consumers who trusted them to protect their data by, you know, again, forcing them into an option of paying or not paying.

**DAVID SPEERS:** But just on this question, Anne Aly, the government's advice is don't pay...

**ANNE ALY, MINISTER FOR YOUTH AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:** Don't pay.

**DAVID SPEERS:** ...the ransom.

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Do you accept there may be times, as Alastair MacGibbon is suggesting, where it might be an option?

**ANNE ALY:** Well, I think the operative word here is 'criminal', right? And there's no such thing as an honest criminal. So even paying the ransom doesn't necessarily guarantee that the data that they have isn't going to be released, whether it's on the black market, on the dark web, or elsewhere. That's the first thing. But I think that the other important point to make here is what Alastair says here, is that, you know, cybercrime is going to get worse and worse and it's going to escalate and there will be new modes of it.

And I just want to put it back to Alastair. I know you're talking about the organisations. I think organisations need to start seeing cybersecurity as part of their core business and developing cybersafe cultures within their organisations as well. A lot of the time a cyber breach is from the weakest link in the chain, which is the human link – someone who has fallen for a phishing scam or some kind of scam within the organisation. And I don't think that there are enough organisations who have paid enough attention to developing cybersecure cultures within their organisation.

**DAVID SPEERS:** If your advice is never pay the ransom, why not make it against the law?

**ANNE ALY:** That's a good question, and one that I don't have an answer to. But I think...you know, at this stage, I think the advice is pretty clear – don't pay the ransom.

**DAVID SPEERS:** OK, but it's not illegal to do so.

**ANNE ALY:** It's not illegal to do so.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Dan Tehan, you were the minister responsible for cybersecurity when Malcolm Turnbull was prime minister. What's your view, coming back to Emina's question on this conundrum of to pay the ransom or not?

**DAN TEHAN, SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP:** Well, in the first instance, you shouldn't pay the ransom because you can't trust the crooks. And the problem is, if you pay the ransom, they can then get almost a double ransom because then they can go and monetise the data. And so they actually get double the reward for what you're doing. But you can never say absolutely never. And that's why to make it outright illegal to pay the ransom, I think, would be cutting off your nose to spite yourself, because there might be a very rare instance where it is the right thing to do and...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Were you ever aware of that as minister?

**DAN TEHAN:** Look, I wasn't as minister. And I think you would find that it is pretty rare. So, as a former diplomat, this is one of the great conundrums, of course, you face if there is a kidnapping in a foreign country and what you do in those instances. Now, once again, the formal government position is you never pay the ransom. But there might be ways or means

that you could get a release of someone and save a life. So that's why you would never say never, but in the first instance, it should be don't pay the ransom.

And I agree with Anne – one of the things all of us have to understand is this threat isn't going away. When I was Australia's first cybersecurity minister, I worked with Alastair, and one of the things that we set about doing was just getting out and publicising the fact to businesses, to individuals and to government that this threat is real. And one of the things we used to say to companies was this has to be a priority around your boardroom.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well...

**DAN TEHAN:** What you would tend to see, it would be right down the bottom.

**DAVID SPEERS:** And arguably it needs to be a high priority, which we're going to come to.

**DAN TEHAN:** Yeah.

**DAVID SPEERS:** But, Emina, let me just come back to you on this, because I understand you were the victim of a cyberattack previously. What can you tell us about that?

**EMINA BESIREVIC:** Yeah, that's correct. About four years ago, I found out that my computer had been hacked and a scammer was posing as my telephone company provider and had been redirecting my payments. And so, for about six months, I was thinking that I was paying my phone bills, whereas it was actually going to the scammer.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Mm.

**EMINA BESIREVIC:** And after investigating that further, I discovered that they had opened an account and purchased a phone in my name, and I had been paying for that unknowingly as well.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Did you get the money back?

**ANNE ALY:** Mm.

**EMINA BESIREVIC:** I did eventually, in the form of credit to...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Right.

**EMINA BESIREVIC:** ...with the phone company provider, yeah.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well, I guess when it comes to what's going on right now with Medibank, I mean, we know there are millions potentially affected here and I'm sure there are people in the room. Perhaps a show of hands. With these recent cyberattacks – Medibank, Optus – who has been affected by this? Put your hand up.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Wow.

**DAVID SPEERS:** OK, well, it's, you know, nearly half, by the looks of it, just in this room alone. And a lot of people are worried about what this is going to mean for them and their data and, look, I'm sure what sort of data is now on the dark web. We've also got someone in the audience here who's in that very situation, Erin Keller-Tuberg. Erin, tell us about your situation.

**ERIN KELLER-TUBERG:** Oh, I actually feel like my privacy is being violated. My family is all... We all use Medibank Private. I'm not a member anymore because I left when I turned 25, but all of that information is out there. You know, it's my date of birth, my sex, my addresses, all of that stuff. It's out there forever. And of course I'm worried about it. I'm really concerned. Unless someone can assure me otherwise, it's out there for good, yeah.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Alastair, what should Erin be doing? What are sort of the two or three things you'd advise right now?

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Yeah, again, well, we saw the show of hands from the audience. It's staggering numbers. What this information does, at the very least, when criminals get their hands on it, is it increases the fidelity or the directness in targeting you. So they'll have updated email addresses, updated telephone numbers and other things to either convince you that they know who you are, and as a consequence, perhaps con you. A lot of this is about scams similar to the last issue. So, you know, there's so much information about us online that's been stolen over time.

It goes to a fundamental question for government eventually about how we identify ourselves online, what credentials we use, rather than handing it over time and time and time again, which becomes a burden for businesses and a loss to you. So be careful of the phone calls you get. Be careful of the emails you get. Be careful of letters you get in the mail. That's a sad undermining of the very fabric of our society, because we rely on trust to do commerce and to, you know, deal with each other. So all of this just undermines trust and confidence in our society.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah. Kamila?

**KAMILA SHAMSIE, AUTHOR:** But it also strikes me the things you mentioned – date of birth, sex, address. How many websites do we give that out to and how many of them need it? I mean, if I want to buy, say, a theatre ticket, they ask...and I'm going to get it online, they're still asking me for that information. So there's another question, I think, about what kind of information should people be allowed to ask.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** And why you collect it in the first place, right?

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** Yeah.

**ANNE ALY:** But you don't even have to purchase online. You can go into a store and have to give your email address and a whole range of other data just to buy a lipstick.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** Yeah.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well, and this is obviously the case in your home country as well.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** (SPEAKS INDISTINCTLY)

**ANNE ALY:** Try it!

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** (LAUGHS)

**DAVID SPEERS:** We are having a debate in light of these high-profile attacks, how long companies have to keep this sort of data for. I mean, would everybody agree that too many companies are keeping too much data for far too long?

**DAN TEHAN:** Well, it's a good question, and I think this will continue to be raised the more we see incidences like we saw with Optus and Medibank. We've put data retention laws in place, mandatory, for specific companies. We did that for a reason, which was to keep the community safe.

Now, these other companies, which aren't required to keep data but are keeping it, we do need to look at, OK, well, what should be the requirements that they need to protect that data? What levels of data do they need to be holding? And then, I think one of the things we're going to do – and hopefully we're going to do this bipartisan...in a bipartisan fashion very shortly – is look at what are the fines...

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:**...that we need to be putting in place for companies when breaches do occur. Because...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well, there's legislation before the parliament right now...

**DAN TEHAN:** There is.

**ANNE ALY:** There is. The Privacy Act.

**DAVID SPEERS:** ...to boost those fines from...

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** \$2 million.

**DAVID SPEERS:**Well, yeah, about \$2 million at the moment.

**ANNE ALY:** No, it's much more than that.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** \$2 million minimum.

**DAN TEHAN:** And...so, one of the...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well, the proposal is for \$50 million, isn't it?

**DAN TEHAN:** Yeah, the proposal is for \$50 million, sir, so...

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah, it's more than that. \$50 million.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** It's two at the moment.

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:** It's two at the moment, and we need to make it a lot bigger.

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:** And there's bipartisan agreement to do that.

**ANNE ALY:** And there is legislation that was introduced by the Attorney-General with the Privacy Act to do just that.

**DAN TEHAN:** Yeah.

**ANNE ALY:** To increase the penalties from \$2 million to \$50 million.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** And what this...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Just quickly, Alastair.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** What this will do is put a price on data, which means you can then calculate risk. When organisations invest in cybersecurity and data protection, they try to do it rationally. I'd argue, by the way, that boards today – and I talk to a lot of boards around the world, but specifically in Australia and New Zealand – have this as number one on their agenda. They want to know what to do to protect themselves, and you. But by putting a price on it, which is a good thing, it means you can make better decisions about investment. So I applaud the concept of raising the price. We also need to look at what the carrot is to improve security for all of us.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Let's get to a question on this, too, from Ying Zhang.

**YING ZHANG:** So, based on what we know right now, what's the driving force behind this spike in cyberattacks? Why now? What's new?

**DAVID SPEERS:** It's a good question. Joe, let me bring you in on this. What is driving this?

**JOE SIRACUSA, PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY:** Well, look, social mobility is a two-edged sword. We were all told it was good and that the new day was coming. And, of course, the bad guys can get on the internet too, and screw you over. In the 1790s and 1800s, the United States paid bribes to Barbary pirates, along with Europeans who didn't have much of a navy to beat them up, and then finally they beat them up and that stopped that. So we have to think of some way to punish the hell out of these people.

You know, you've talked about you do not criminalise paying. And I think you should always have a back channel. Officially, the deal is, we don't deal with terrorists and people like that. But I think, when you catch somebody, you ought to send them to jail for a long time. We treat people on the internet who steal things like they were characters in a Walt Disney movie. We think it's funny. It's some 16-year-old kid or whatever. Maybe some 22-year-old kid hanging around somewhere in some coffee shop in Prague, screwing you over. We ought to throw the book at these people, and we should make it very clear that we're going to go after them and everybody else.

And also we could become a little more proactive. We could go after them. There isn't anything that they can do to us that we can't do to them. I mean, that's kind of the bad secret around Washington. We can do things, too. But I think also the government has to compensate people who get worked over. I mean, there has to be some kind of a program to help them. But, you know, in this age of data... And you're right, you literally have to give your birthday to get a pizza delivered and stuff like that. I think we have to think very carefully about the future landscape and where we're going to be. I mean, if we're just going to give in over and over again or build it into the price of something, then I think we're on the back foot and it's a losing proposition. But I think we should be very tough. We should have laws and we should have Australian kids, as they're growing up, know that if they indulge in this, they're going to pay a very, very heavy price.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Just one more... In the interest of finding some solutions here... And, yes, the penalties are obviously being addressed by the parliament, but there's also been some talk, and I know Katy Gallagher is talking to her state counterparts about this – having a national ID system where your ID is verified, presumably by a government agency. Instead of having to give it to all the companies that need your...they can just verify it with that agency. Now, I'm not sure if everyone would be comfortable with going down that path, but, Alastair, what do you think about this?

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** The document verification service exists now. It just needs to be expanded. We need to... So, already, you know, banks and others can basically say, "I've had this credential shown to me by Dan Tehan." They can recognise the photo on the passport that he's handed over and check it on their databases. You get a tick and then no more information needs to be collected.

**DAVID SPEERS:** They don't need to hold that data?

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** No. Theoretically, no. And some of the reasons why that data has been held is because not all organisations have access to the document verification service. That needs to be expanded. We need to ask about the credentials that we issue people because that's pretty easy to copy, most of this stuff. I've been in houses where criminals have had lots of identities all legitimately issued by states, because that's what criminals do. So we've got to get smarter about the identity issue and the checking.

**DAVID SPEERS:** But would this basically resolve the issue where you wouldn't need companies like Medibank and Optus and so on holding all this data – they'd simply check you are who you say you are?

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Yeah, but to provide a service to you, organisations will still have to collect something, right? I mean, data is an important part of business. The question is, have you collected too much data, you know, that's not necessary? To your point, why do you need to give an email address to get a receipt in a business these days? It's just shocking.

**ANNE ALY:** I don't do it.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** No. And some restaurants, to order...

**ANNE ALY:** I tell them, "Nup, you can't have it."

**DAVID SPEERS:** If the Minister says she doesn't do it, then the rest of us...

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** The rest of us shouldn't either. Especially for your lipstick.

**ANNE ALY:** They don't need my email address.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Yeah. No, but it's because it's all part of them building up databases because they've seen data is free.

Can I go back to the question about why these criminals exist? They primarily operate out of safe havens.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Failed states, or states that don't care about the West.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah. Ying, let me just come back...

**DAN TEHAN:** No, but there's another point, though, that Joe raised, which I think is a really important one.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:** And that is, we have to have greater offensive capability, even where they're in safe havens, to go after them. And there was a \$9.9 billion investment, REDSPICE, which once again, the government is going to build on to make sure we do have that capability to go after them.

**DAVID SPEERS:** OK, that's a fair point.

**DAN TEHAN:** We've gotta make sure...

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah, we do. Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:** ...that we do pursue them. And I think Joe is absolutely right.

**DAVID SPEERS:** No, that's a fair point.

**DAN TEHAN:** And you've gotta make sure we've got the capability to do it.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Ying, let me just come back to you, because you actually work in financial crime prevention. From your expertise in this, how well protected are we really?

**YING ZHANG:** I would say, because fintech is a relatively new industry compared to all the banking industry, so we are actually easier to be targeted by the criminals. So I would say we have a lot to do in this space. And I think the number one thing that's preventing us from being better at fighting financial crime is all of the things we're doing today are reactive.

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah.

**YING ZHANG:** So attacks happen, we react to it, we build rules to attack them. But the problem is that we will never be fast enough. We'll never be faster, like, compared to the fraudsters. So I was wondering, what can we do to be more proactive? So one thing we're trying to do in the industry is to leverage machine learning to build a customer profile for the customer's normal behaviours, and then if something suspicious happens, we can detect it earlier and then we can block it, and so that we can protect the customers. But we are... I would say we're still not there yet. We have a lot to do.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah.

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah, 'cause I was... Ying, your question about, you know, "Why now?" really baffled me, because it's not just now – this is actually something that's been going on for a while. And the warning signs...

**DAVID SPEERS:** But the data we saw the other day shows it's really picking up.

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah. It has increased. Yes, absolutely. But that's what criminals do. They innovate and they are opportunistic. And, you know, wherever they see an opportunity and a vulnerability, that's where they'll go and that's where they'll head. So, you know, the idea of being more proactive and not so reactive, as you mentioned, I think is a really important point there to stress.

**DAVID SPEERS:** OK, I want to move on, because there's plenty to get to tonight. Our next question from Melissa Keller-Tuberg.

**MELISSA KELLER-TUBERG:** Elon Musk wants to create an internet where the most privileged people in society can punch down at marginalised groups – queer people, people of colour, women and gender minorities, and the Jewish community – without facing any consequences. In one of his first tweets as owner, he stated, "Comedy is now legal on Twitter," but the real comedy, in my opinion, is that after people started making parody accounts impersonating Elon, he banned them. What is the panel's position on Elon's policy changes on e-safety, and how should Australia and Australians respond?

**DAVID SPEERS:** Melissa, thank you. Kamala, what do you think?

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** You know, I think we pay a lot of attention to what Elon Musk is doing because he's telling us things all the time. He'll tell us something one day, and the next day he'll change his mind again. I'm far more concerned about the people who aren't telling us what they think. I mean, what Elon Musk has compared...in terms of numbers, Twitter has, what, about 350 million. Facebook has near three billion. Is that an OK space? And we get so focused on the individual, and we know about this one individual, so we think about what he's going to do rather than thinking about the platforms and how they're working.

Facebook is not a benign space. None of these are benign spaces and none of them are existing for our good. I think what's going to happen with Twitter is he's going to try a lot of different things and see how people respond, see how his advertisers respond. And I think we're going to see... Right now there are a lot of people saying, "Oh, I'm going to leave. I'm about to leave." And this is going to be like all those Americans who said, "If George Bush wins the election, I'm going to Canada. If George Bush wins the next election, I'm going to Canada. If Trump wins, I'm going to Canada." And all the Canadians are standing there saying, "Well, where are you?"

You know, the fact is, we go on these social media platforms, we find things we enjoy and we get comfortable. It goes back to the previous conversation. We get much too comfortable with, "Well, I just use it this way. I don't have to pay attention to that. There's all this other stuff going on." And I think we need to really step back and think about... We sort of landed into the world of the online world, you know. I mean, I was at university when it was this great Wild West, and I don't think we have yet had the conversations with ourselves enough about what we are doing in terms of the very concept of privacy, which absolutely does not exist in the way it did.

**DAVID SPEERS:** You're on Twitter.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** I'm on Twitter.

**DAVID SPEERS:** It sounds like you're going to stay on Twitter.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** I'm on Twitter. I'm on Facebook. I'm on Instagram.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Mm.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** And I lie to myself all the time about them, because, you know...

**DAVID SPEERS:** What do you mean by that?

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** Well, I can be sitting in Sydney and having great conversations with many Pakistani cricket fans about the World Cup semifinal, and that feels great and there's a sense of community and you're getting information fast and you really like the feeling of getting information fast and knowing what people are saying. And you enter this sort of siloed-off world where even though you're aware all this other stuff is going on, you are living...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Mm.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** And I'm including myself in that – you're living in the siloed-off world. I know what's being said about Muslims and migrants and other people, and it's nothing new. This isn't starting with Elon Musk. You think this has been a pleasant world on Twitter for all...for marginalised communities until now?

**DAN TEHAN:** No.

**DAVID SPEERS:** That's very... It's a very honest take.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Yeah.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Joe, let me come to you on this. What are your thoughts on Elon Musk and Twitter?

**JOE SIRACUSA:** Look, I don't like Elon Musk. I think he's a fruitcake.

**ANNE ALY:** Tell us what you really think! (LAUGHS) Be honest, Joe.

**JOE SIRACUSA:** And he plays us from day one. He knew he wanted to become a US citizen, but he knew that, coming from South Africa, that was going to be harder. So he became a Canadian citizen first and then he worked his way into America. You cannot... And this is the guy before him, too, and all the others. You can't put someone in charge of a network that allows hundreds of millions of people to say or not say what they want to say, and you're in charge of moderating or what goes forward, what goes back...

The day that Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, he had 88 billion followers on Twitter and he only had 74 million votes that day. He had more Twitter followers than he had votes. Now, I've been to Europe a number of times to see security...at security conferences, and some very serious people used to wake up every morning and look at Brexit and Twitter to see what they were going to do for the rest of the day. I mean, people are able to control people with these kinds of things. The idea that we have these huge public spaces that are really unregulated by government, this is the Wild West, these places, and I think we've got to do more.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Well, it's not really unregulated.

**JOE SIRACUSA:** Well...

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** David, I promise I'll speak less at the tail end of this when I get out of my sort of zone. In fact, stop me later.

**DAVID SPEERS:** I wouldn't dare.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** But you might recall, I was the first eSafety Commissioner.

**DAVID SPEERS:** You were. You were. This was back in 2015?

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Yeah, I think it was 2015. Around that time.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Social media was probably a little different back then.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Yeah. And it... Well, yes, but equally, it wasn't a pleasant place...

**DAN TEHAN:** No.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** ...for women, for children, for...

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah, Twitter was a cesspool.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Still a very divisive place.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Mm.

**ANNE ALY:** Mm.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Twitter and all of those other social media platforms have become a really important communications tool for all of us. They've gone beyond those companies now. You know, Twitter is the world's newsroom, it's the online newsroom, whether we like it or not. Australia moved the first legislation in the world to start pushing our values, our norms onto our part of that internet, as is right and proper. Doesn't mean you have to agree with everything on there. The unwinding of those staff in Twitter by Elon Musk and the sacking of staff, or the announcement by Meta today that are getting rid of thousands of people...

**DAVID SPEERS:** We should just clarify that. So, Twitter looks like they've sacked about half their staff. And a lot of that is people who do the content moderation.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** A lot of people are those trust and safety people.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yep.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** The people that are actually there doing the horrendous job of sifting through the sewerage of the internet, trying to keep us marginally safe. People that would have to respond to the new eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant – she's not that new, she's been there for years.

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah, she's been a while.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Does a great job. Who is she going to write to now to enforce Australian law and Australian standards on our part of the internet?

**DAVID SPEERS:** Mm.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** That's a dangerous place to be. The last thing I'd say is this – these social media platforms become the vehicle for disinformation and misinformation, which pick at the very fabric of our society, our democracy.

**ANNE ALY:** Mm.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** And we've seen the effect it's had.

**ANNE ALY:** Mm.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** January 6, you know, the riots at the Capitol. It was largely driven online.

**ANNE ALY:** Mm.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** And until you realise that free speech doesn't mean the ability to harm people. You know, you have a contra view. That's fine. Go, Anne. Sorry.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah.

**ANNE ALY:** I just want to bring in here the issue of youth and the content because, you know, maybe we do choose what we watch, but a lot of people don't. And that's because of the algorithms. And in fact, I want to look at...just mention some research that was done by Reset Australia, which showed that 41% of 16- and 17-year-olds were exposed to content that was...that underlines the incel discourse, and that could lead...according to Reset, that could lead to a violent act.

And in fact, the Reset research shows that some of these young people are getting this content more often than they are having Sunday dinners. Right? And this is through the algorithms. This is something that should worry everybody – that young people, and they're getting younger and younger, through the algorithms that are set through these social media platforms, are being...are viewing and are being exposed to disinformation, misinformation, yes, but white supremacist content from homegrown...homegrown domestic white supremacist content, anti-Semitic content, far-right content and incel content, and particularly young white men are being exposed to this content.

**DAVID SPEERS:** And you're talking what sort of age, again? This was?

**ANNE ALY:** 16, 17-year-olds.

**DAVID SPEERS:** 16, 17-year-olds. Yeah.

**ANNE ALY:** Now, that doesn't mean that everyone who sees this content is going to, you know, automatically be radicalised. No, the radicalisation process is much more complex than that. But what we do know about why people leave extremist movements behind is because they get exposed to something that plants a seed of doubt and makes them question their beliefs. Now, if the algorithms keep feeding you and feeding you and feeding you the same content...

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Echo chamber.

**ANNE ALY:**...you're never going to get that...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Mm.

**ANNE ALY:**...they're never going to get that exposure to the things that challenge that content.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Dan Tehan, just coming back to Melissa's question, though...

**DAN TEHAN:** Yeah.

**DAVID SPEERS:** ...about the arrival of Elon Musk at Twitter. What do you think? Are you going to stick around?

**DAN TEHAN:** Well, Twitter's a gutter. It's a gutter. So my advice would be, if you don't like it, get out of it. And...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Are you still on there?

**DAN TEHAN:** I am still on it, David. I am. But hear me out. I'm on it because, you know what I use it for?

**ANNE ALY:** What?

**DAN TEHAN:** There are people in that gutter who have a crack at me the whole time in the most vile way. Right? And they do it to Leigh Sales. And Leigh Sales has said it's the extreme left that does it to her, right? What I do is I poke the bear every now and again. I just say...

**ANNE ALY:** Why, why, why, why, why?

**DAN TEHAN:** Why, why? Because... Why? I mean, it's a gutter. It's a gutter. You've got to admit what it is.

**ANNE ALY:** Get out of the gutter, Dan!

**DAN TEHAN:** Well, get out of the gutter. That's...

**ANNE ALY:** I got out of it a long time ago.

**DAN TEHAN:** Well done. Well done.

**ANNE ALY:** I call it a festering cesspool.

**DAN TEHAN:** I didn't go on it for... I sort of stayed away for a little while. And then...

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Missed it?

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:** ...just every now and again, I just sort of have a little bit of fun, but...

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** I've got to say, the world of Pakistani cricket fans, that's not a gutter – that's very nice.

**DAN TEHAN:** But my serious... Get out. Get out.

**DAVID SPEERS:** You both... What did you call it? A festering cesspool?

**ANNE ALY:** I've always called it a festering cesspool.

**DAVID SPEERS:** So you're not on there.

**ANNE ALY:** Not on there.

**DAVID SPEERS:** You called it a gutter. Maybe you should just be following the Pakistani...

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** Yeah, cricket fans. We're very funny.

**DAN TEHAN:** Yes, well...

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** We'll make you laugh.

**DAN TEHAN:** We love things that are funny.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:** And I love cricket, like you. And I was very keen to see that you still play cricket. That's fantastic.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** There you go.

**DAVID SPEERS:** We're getting a little off topic here.

**DAN TEHAN:** Yes, it is. It's um...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Anyway.

**DAN TEHAN:** But seriously, when it comes to Twitter, it is, it's a gutter. And if you don't like it, and I would say to everyone, get off it, 'cause the stuff that is on there is abhorrent.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Would you say that to yourself, as well, just to be clear?

**DAN TEHAN:** Look, I'm happy to get off it, seriously. I only... The only reason that I have any interest in it whatsoever is to see what is on it.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:** And the other thing is, it is really bad... No, no. As someone who is in a position... 'Cause I've got to tell you...

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** And I spend my time looking at it too, to know... Yeah.

**DAN TEHAN:** ...with a lot of these things, it's not only radicalisation. The stuff... And Twitter, this is something that the eSafety Commissioner has written to them about – the child pornography that is...

**ANNE ALY:** The sharing of abhorrent material.

**DAN TEHAN:** Yeah, look, it is... It's appalling.

**DAVID SPEERS:** OK.

**DAN TEHAN:** And we do need to be a lot firmer with these companies.

**ANNE ALY:** Which is also illegal.

**DAN TEHAN:** It's also...it's illegal. And do you know what happened when she wrote to them?

**DAVID SPEERS:** OK.

**DAN TEHAN:** Nothing.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Yeah. Well, I think we get the impression there's a fair bit of bad stuff going on there. But I think, Alastair, you made the fair point as well that, you know, sometimes there's helpful information that comes out of there as well.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Oh, of course. There...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Communities that form and all of that.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** It is a vehicle that gets misused, but it's still legitimate, it needs to be protected, because that's how...

**DAN TEHAN:** Is it legitimate?

**DAVID SPEERS:** OK.

**DAN TEHAN:** Is it really legitimate that we allow...?

**ANNE ALY:** Twitter's not the only vehicle.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON (SPEAKS INDISTINCTLY)**

**DAVID SPEERS:** Thank you, Dan Tehan. I think we've got your particular take on it.

**ANNE ALY:** I mean, we're talking about Twitter, but...

**DAVID SPEERS:** I want to move on.

**ANNE ALY:** ...there's a whole lot of other ones as well.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** He won't have us back if we keep doing this.

**DAN TEHAN:** No.

**DAVID SPEERS:** No, Exactly. And if you are just joining us, you're watching Q+A. We're talking a lot about Twitter.

**DAN TEHAN:** It's meant to be a discussion, David.

**DAVID SPEERS:** You might even be tweeting about the show as we're talking about it, no doubt. And we're live with Kamila Shamsie, Dan Tehan, Anne Aly, Alastair MacGibbon and Joe Siracusa.

Now, let's get to the debate over the repatriation of women and children from Syrian refugee camps. Here's a video question from David Quinless.

**DAVID QUINLESS, WARRNAMBOOL, VIC, EASTERN MAAR COUNTRY**

Was keeping the women and children in a Syrian refugee camp both a cruel and unusual punishment and something that Australia should be ashamed of? Or is bringing them home again making us unsafe?

**DAVID SPEERS:** Kamila, let me come to you first on this one. I mean, Australia is not the only country trying to deal with this difficult situation. What do you think?

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** Look, it's a complicated situation, and partly it's complicated by the fact that it's hard to know what people were doing when they were there. You cannot assume that everyone who went was involved in something horrific. And you can't assume that everyone who...certainly, you know everyone who went was not. And it's very hard without the information gathering. But you...there is something quite horrendous about this idea of, we will make people stateless or we will abrogate our responsibility to our citizens and say, "Just stay in that hellhole so no-one has to deal with you." Every nation has to have a way of dealing with its criminals.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Mm.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** It is a criminal act. The going, for most places, has been a criminal act. There has to be a way of dealing with it. There has to be a way of looking at individual cases and deciding, "Are you still a threat? Are you not?" In the case of children, it is disgraceful that there are children who are born and have lived years now...Australian citizens or British citizens or whatever they are, that their governments have said, "You just stay in the hellhole. You are a child of this nation, but you're not really. And we'd actually be more comfortable just taking your citizenship away and saying, 'We have nothing to do with you.'" You've got to take responsibility.

**DAVID SPEERS:** We'll come back to the politicians on this. But Joe Siracusa, I'm interested in your take on this as well, because the US too has been dealing with this.

**JOE SIRACUSA:** Right. Look, I have a very large view of human nature. If these people, the adults, abjure the violent lifestyle and the people that brought them over there and they want to return to Australia, we should have a big enough heart to take them back. I mean, Australia actually started as a penal colony, as I recall, and everybody had a second chance.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Good point.

**JOE SIRACUSA:** So they deserve a second chance too. But this idea of offering an amnesty to people who were trying to kill yesterday... You know, I grew up with the Vietnam War and the Civil War and all that. You have to provide an amnesty and give them a chance to become useful citizens. But this idea of turning people stateless, it's not only inhumane, it actually says more about us than them. It tells the world what kind of people we are. And I don't think Australians are like that at all.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Dan Tehan, the Coalition in government repatriated a group of the children of ISIS fighters, including one who is 17, another who was 18, so technically an adult. Why was it OK for you to do it, when now you're arguing Labor shouldn't be?

**DAN TEHAN:** Well, David, they were orphans who were repatriated and, as I understand it, were repatriated based on the national security advice that we were given at the time. And so we were very firmly be able...were able to say that this was about making sure, first, that Australians are kept safe, which is the number one priority of any government, is to keep your citizens safe. And then obviously there was the assessments that was made, and the guidance that was given that that fundamental priority...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well, the Albanese government says it's following security advice as well.

**DAN TEHAN:** So, what we are not seeing from the current government is any sort of transparency around what they're doing and the decisions that they're making.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Like what? What transparency did you provide that they're not?

**DAN TEHAN:** Well, so, the transparency that they haven't provided, and I wasn't the relevant minister at the time...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well, you didn't raise a concern then, though.

**DAN TEHAN:** No, but no-one raised any of the issues.

**DAVID SPEERS:** No, so what transparency do you want now that was provided earlier?

**DAN TEHAN:** Alright, so, to start with, the first we heard about any of this was on the front page of a major Australian newspaper. So that was the first instance that anyone heard about it. And then the next we heard that they would be settled in western Sydney and settled amongst the refugees who had fled from ISIS to seek refuge here.

**DAVID SPEERS:** So, where did the kids you brought back go?

**DAN TEHAN:** Well, that is something that obviously I don't know and I'm not going to disclose here on...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Don't you want the transparency around that?

**DAN TEHAN:** No, but, David, I mean, the transparency amongst orphans coming back versus women who went to Syria knowing that it was illegal to do so, that they broke the law doing what they did. We had put national security laws in place on a bipartisan basis, which said these were declared areas, and if you went there, you were breaking the law. And not only that, there would be dire consequences in doing it.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Anne Aly, let me just get a response from you on those points.

**ANNE ALY:** You see, Dan and I had a pact before we came on here that we wouldn't interrupt each other. Um, OK. So, a number of things. Where do I begin?

**DAN TEHAN:** And I will stick to that pact.

**ANNE ALY:** Oh, you just didn't! Where do I begin? OK, so, first of all, yes, David, you're absolutely right in pointing out that when the opposition was in government, they did bring back orphans and a group of young people. And, as you rightly mentioned, David, some of them were adults, and there was no transparency around that. And if you want evidence of the fact that there's no transparency around that, the person who was in government at the time can't even tell you where they've been settled here, back here in Australia. So a lack of transparency.

Secondly, I find it incredibly disappointing, because we have always had a bipartisan approach to national security. And so Dan would know very well that we take national security very seriously and that we would not have brought anyone back who had not been security cleared, and that all of this has been done in very close consultation with the national security agencies.

Thirdly, yes, we do have a responsibility, because every other country has taken back...or is grappling with this issue, and at least has done something and taken them back.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Not every country has taken back their citizens.

**ANNE ALY:** Most of them have. Most Western countries have. Fourthly, I want to really address this point about this trope about the ISIS brides. Because, Dan, if you ever met or heard the story of how some of them got there, they did not go willingly. Many were children when they went there, 15-, 16-year-olds. Many went there because they were duped into going there. But regardless of how they got there or where they went there, if they are currently being assessed by our national security agencies as not being a threat, then they should be allowed back, number one. With facing all of the consequences that they will be facing for breaking the law as they have.

But let me tell you something about radicalisation. It doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens in an environment which is conducive to radicalisation. You leave them there, they will become radicalised and the next theatre of jihad, they will be the fighters on the front line for the next theatre of jihad and be more of a security risk.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Anne Aly, let me just come back, though, to the concern that's not just from the opposition, but some of the community leaders in western Sydney and particularly communities that fled ISIS in Syria. How much consultation was there with them? Because they are pretty upset.

**ANNE ALY:** Look, I absolutely understand that they're upset, but, you know, a lot of that is very much because... You know, no doubt, no question, I don't think anybody ever is arguing that ISIS was a brutal and disgusting regime. And what happened to the Yazidi people and to the minorities in Iraq and Syria is absolutely heartbreaking. And we are happy to have those people resettled here in Australia. Absolutely, yes. But you didn't consult either, Dan.

**DAVID SPEERS:** No, but do they deserve some assurance or comfort that there is monitoring going on?

**ANNE ALY:** There is monitoring going on. They do deserve that and there is monitoring going on. We have some of the best security agencies in the world. We do. And they are not going to compromise the safety and the security of the Australian people. And I think that's really important to talk positively about our agencies.

I know you believe and you have faith in our AFP and all our security agencies, Dan. To talk positively about those security agencies, to let people know that their safety is first and

foremost on the minds of our government and of our security agencies, and that they have been assessed, the risk has been assessed. They will be monitored. That risk will continually be assessed and that...Australians will be kept safe as a priority, for whoever is in government.

**DAN TEHAN:** So, Dai Le, the local member of parliament, has written to the Home Affairs Minister on behalf of 20 community organisations in western Sydney, asking a series of questions and wanting to meet with her. Surely that...if the Minister did that, that would be a good thing because those 20 community groups who represent the Yazidis, the Assyrians, have real concerns.

**ANNE ALY:** And they deserve to be...for their hearts to be at rest. I agree with that, Dan.

**DAN TEHAN:** So why isn't that occurring? That's...

**ANNE ALY:** Well, I don't know if that's not occurring.

**DAN TEHAN:** Well, I mean...

**ANNE ALY:** That's something that I've not been privy to.

**DAN TEHAN:** Well, it's not occurring. They've written a letter asking for it to occur.

**DAVID SPEERS:** I want to move on. Just very quickly, do you agree it'd be a good idea, Minister, to meet with the communities?

**ANNE ALY:** Oh, I think it would be a good idea, because I do think that they need... But at the same time, let's not add to their fear, you know? Let's not add to their fear. Let's keep just reassuring all Australians that we have their safety and security at our...you know, in our sights, no matter which government...no matter who is in government.

**DAVID SPEERS:** OK, let's move on. Let's move on from that. Plenty to get to tonight. Next question from Mark Dixon.

**MARK DIXON:** Good evening. The United States considers itself to be the bastion of democracy, and yet the primary instigator of the January 6 attack on the Capitol building continues to deny losing the election and well may be re-elected to office in 2024. Do you see a future for true democracy in the United States, and what will it take to establish a cohesive society?

**DAVID SPEERS:** Big question. Joe Siracusa, what do you think?

**JOE SIRACUSA:** Look, democracy in America is a work in progress. It's been going on since the 1760s and...we've had a lot of strange people involved in the process who've excluded a lot of other people and, you know... And America has done very well with immigrants, and we've got all kinds of minority groups in government.

When you get up to Donald Trump, for example, nothing can really explain what he was doing. He was a television host who wound up as president of the United States. Now, he was elected by people who'd given up on Washington. He didn't have a movement. The movement found him. He was going to go to Washington, give Washington the middle finger and, you know, have a good time and all the rest of it.

And so he's the major threat now because he's kind of unloosed all the fruitcakes in the hills of America, and all the strange people are now coming down from the hills and getting involved. And they all went to the people's house on January 6 to tell the people's government that they're very unhappy with them, which, by the way, Thomas Jefferson might have been amused by the whole thing, as a matter of fact, but the...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Sorry, amused by...?

**JOE SIRACUSA:** By the protest, because Jefferson said that the tree of liberty has to be nourished every 20 years by the blood of tyrants and patriots. He wouldn't see a problem there. You know, I grew up in the '60s when...

**DAVID SPEERS:** It was a bit more than protest, though, to be fair. Just...

**JOE SIRACUSA:** Yeah, that's true. But in the '60s, cities burned, people died all over the place, the anti-war, the anti-everything movement. I mean, today, when I look at these movements, I think, "Well, it's kind of a pale thing of what was going on in the '60s." Now, my point is this – I think America will come through. It won't be recognisable. But my beef is, and finally here, America's in this position – Australia may even be in this position one day, and half of Europe and Asia too – because I believe that the political and cultural elites have let people down over the last 20 years.

These are the people who didn't explain globalisation, though they enjoyed the hell out of it. These are people who knew things were going. These are the people who tell us, "We've got to take the lead in climate change," and don't do a damn thing about it. These are the people who take the lead in everything. I think half the world... Because of, you know, the deference we've had for the elites, I think they've left us leaderless and I think they're incompetent, you know, and this is why, when I get near a university, I say, "You ought to start pumping money into universities," because young people are going to have to figure this problem out. Because Australia doesn't have forever. The history of Australia is not carved in stone. We're going to wind up one day as a little patch on a wall in the British Museum if we're not real careful. If we're not real careful.

But the point is, is that I think there's a lot of reasons for the things that are happening, but what drives me nuts, for the past 40 years, is how the elites have gone from these people you trust... During the Cold War, they did a great job, and in the last 20 years, not such a great job, and we don't trust these anymore. I can just prove my point by saying that,

"Is there one person in Australia who can go on television or radio and explain to somebody, explain to the nation in a crisis...settle people down and explain what's going on around the world?" I mean, 40 years ago, you had lots of people who could do that, but, today, I don't see that. Anyway, I think we've been let down, up and down the board.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Coming back to Mark's question about the fate of democracy, I suppose, in the US – Kamila, what do you think, you know, particularly in light of yesterday's midterm elections, where the Republicans made modest gains, but not the red wave that many had predicted? And there's now a bit of a question mark over the prospect of Donald Trump running as a presidential candidate again. What do you think when you look at the United States and the future of its democracy?

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** I'm worried about democracies everywhere. You know, I mean, I grew up in Pakistan under military rule. I was 15 years old when democracy arrived in the form of a 35-year-old woman, Benazir Bhutto. And to be young and to feel democracy come alive, it was such an extraordinary event. And I remember feeling everyone else is so unlucky

because they aren't here in this moment. And now I sort of feel like... I feel as though I saw democracy being born in one country and now I'm seeing it in infirmity around the globe. It does feel scary.

It feels – you're right – as though people don't trust their politicians anymore. I think the Iraq War was a major part of that – the sense of we were lied to, we protested against it, and then there were just lies told about weapons of mass destruction in order for this to go ahead. And also, I think, we don't talk enough about the role of money in government donations. If you look at... If we're going back to America, one of Joe Biden's great successes was seen as what came to be known as the climate bill – the most significant climate legislation to happen in America. But it was held up in the Senate because it couldn't get through till Joe Manchin signed off on it. We know it is a fact that he is the largest recipient of donations from the energy sector.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Hmm.

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** And until he said... And until the rest of the Democratic Party agreed to the rewording of certain things that gave concessions, that bill didn't go through. How is this democracy? How on Earth is this democracy, if someone, who is being paid, by the energy sector, a huge amount of money in donations is able to hold up the most significant climate legislation America's ever known?

**DAVID SPEERS:** Just to pick up on the democratic will of the people expressed in those elections yesterday, our time, in the midterms – one of the striking features was the role of women voters after the Roe v Wade decision in the United States overturning the abortion law. We also saw women play a very influential role in the Australian election, Anne Aly, turfing out the Morrison government. A lot of independents elected, Labor as well. Are women playing a more influential role in elections? And, Dan Tehan, keen for your thoughts on that too.

**ANNE ALY:** I don't know. I think women have always played an influential role in elections, I mean, simply by the fact that we're 50...more than 50% of the population, right? But I think that women's issues were more front and centre of elections, and are becoming more front and centre of elections, particularly, you know, in Australia. At the last election, there were certainly issues. Many of them were brought to light through the issues that happened within Parliament House and the treatment of women in Parliament House, but also we had the great...the Women's March and we were all told that we should be grateful that we weren't shot with bullets. And so, you know, I think women have always played a part, a political role, but...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Those issues.

**ANNE ALY:**...it's women's issues now that are at the fore, and I think that's a bloody good thing.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Dan Tehan?

**DAN TEHAN:** Good for you, Anne. Well, as someone whose mother was a member of parliament...

**ANNE ALY:** Was a woman.

**DAN TEHAN:**...and a woman, was my mother and a woman, of course, I think women have always played a significant role, but I think we're starting to see, in representation, them

expanding that role, and I think that's a very good thing. I mean, my mother was my political mentor. She was outstanding, did a fantastic job as a member of the Kennett government. They came into power when the state was completely bankrupt, on its knees, and were able to turn it around in no time. And she had the very difficult job of transforming the health system here in Victoria, and did, and did a remarkable job at it and... You know, one of the things I think this Victorian state government needs now is my mother back running the Health Ministry. So... But, look, so, I...

**DAVID SPEERS:** Alright.

**DAN TEHAN:** Yeah, let's see more women...

**DAVID SPEERS:** There's consensus on that.

**DAN TEHAN:** ...and let's make sure that they're a part of it.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Just because we've got you here, Joe, let me just come back to US politics very briefly. Donald Trump – does he run?

**JOE SIRACUSA:** Yes, sir, he's going to. It's going to be a rematch with Joe Biden.

**DAVID SPEERS:** And Joe Biden runs as well?

**JOE SIRACUSA:** And we're going to have the 45th president and the 46th president go up for it in 2024 to see who becomes the 47th president.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Alright. Well, we'll see if that turns out.

Let's get to our final question for the evening. It comes from Rose La Vie.

**ROSE LA VIE:** I'd like to first acknowledge our First Nations peoples, particularly the Kulin nation peoples here in Melbourne. And I'd like to ask Kamila and Anne...I'd like to thank you for your dignified, empowering leadership roles, and I'd like to ask, are Muslim women finally being valued in our societies and workplaces?

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well, it picks up, really, from where we were. Kamila, what do you think – Muslim women in particular in leadership roles?

**KAMILA SHAMSIE:** Not a lot, no. No. I mean, you'll have... You'll have cases of individual attainment and success, but if you're looking larger-scale, I think there's still rampant Islamophobia all over the place. And in the case of women, that often expresses itself in thinking they need to be saved, they must be victims of something, they need to be saved from something.

I would like to say... I mean, again, I can't talk about Australia. I can talk about Britain. I don't see much change happening. You know, there are men who are... And, again, you'll see more Muslim men being visible...and it's sort of interesting, when they're politicians, how they sort of do a little dance step of, "No, no, I'm not really Muslim." You know, in the case of Sajid Javid, when he was home secretary, he was very clear about not being Muslim until the Tory Party was accused of Islamophobia, at which point, he said, "How can my party be Islamophobic? I'm Muslim." You know? And that... As long as you have people who are having to do this sort of dance of, "No, I'm not, except when it's useful to you"... You know, I can't think of... I mean, there are Muslim women MPs. Some of them are fantastic. But,

again, those are individual cases. It is not a... It is not society-wide. That change is really not happening.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Anne Aly?

**ANNE ALY:** Thank you, Rose La Vie, for your beautiful question, and your beautiful name too. I think that, you know... When I think about this, I tend to think more towards the future and how incumbent it is on me that not only do I hold the gate open, but I actually smash the gate down and break down the walls and take the bullets and make the path for those who come after me and after me and after me. And I think that's where I like to think about it.

Yes, I agree – there are still so many challenges. And, you know, if you look at Iran, for example, and what's happening in Iran and the struggle that they are having in Iran because they are using a piece of clothing that is of significant religious significance to Islam, using it as a political tool of oppression for women in Iran, you know, globally, I don't think the lot for Muslim women has changed much at all.

And, you know, I agree with Kamila that there are individual women, and I'm very privileged to be one of those women. And so I take very, very, very seriously the responsibility that I have a heavy weight on my shoulders to make sure that I may be the first, but I won't be the last, and that those who come after me have shoulders to stand on and a door and a gate and a wall that's been broken down so that they can be the next and the next and the next and the next. Like little Bella.

**DAVID SPEERS:** I'm...

**ANNE ALY:** Like young Bella here.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Well, indeed. Nice to see you here. Look, I'm not sure if any of the blokes on the panel want to comment on that. Alastair, it's a bit outside your wheelhouse.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** I'm as qualified as Dan Tehan, as a middle-aged Australian male.

**ANNE ALY:** But you have an opinion on this, right?

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** Absolutely, and...

**ANNE ALY:** And we can't do it on our own, right?

**DAN TEHAN:** And I wouldn't mind saying a word, if it's alright.

**ALASTAIR MacGIBBON:** If I could... I'll be brief, Dan, to give you more time, trust me. If I could just narrow it to my profession, only 21% of the people in cybersecurity in Australia identify as women, and I'm sure it's a much smaller percentage of Muslim women. This is an existential threat. We need all kinds of people, all kinds of past and views to help fight. So, the more diverse, the more equal we are, the more chance we have to...

**DAVID SPEERS:** And, Dan, just very quickly.

**DAN TEHAN:** So, can I just say, Anne's absolutely right – this is not something which she alone should carry the burden of. All of us need to. And we are doing really good work in this country. We've still got to do more. But, yesterday, I was with Bachar Houli, who is a...

**ANNE ALY:** He's my bro!

**DAN TEHAN:** Yeah, absolutely. Who's a male who's doing outstanding work, in particular, with young female footballers, Muslim women, and making sure that they're going to grow and be leaders within the community. So, there is really good work going on. So Anne does have support right across the board, whether it's from males, females or anyone else.

**DAVID SPEERS:** And even political opponents as well.

**DAN TEHAN:** Yes.

**DAVID SPEERS:** Good to hear. Look, that's all we have time for.

**DAN TEHAN:** And we didn't interrupt each other.

**DAVID SPEERS:** No. Well, not much. Not much. Not much.

Please thank our panel: Kamila Shamsie, Dan Tehan, Anne Aly, Alastair MacGibbon and Joe Siracusa. And thanks to those of you here, and at home as well, for driving the conversation.

Next week, Stan Grant will be back, live in Sydney, with plenty to discuss, including the anticipated meeting between Anthony Albanese and Xi Jinping. Joining the panel to answer your questions will be: the former US ambassador, Joe Hockey; chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee, Peter Khalil; writer and filmmaker Santilla Chingaibe; and one of the world's leading war experts, Professor Lawrence Friedman; and foreign affairs columnist for the Financial Times, Gideon Rachman.

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**DAVID SPEERS:** Head to our website to register to be in the audience. Goodnight.

**[ENDS]**

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**THE HON DR ANNE ALY MP**  
**MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**  
**MINISTER FOR YOUTH**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**&OE TRANSCRIPT**

**Q&A**

**SYDNEY, ABC WITH VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

**THURSDAY, 7 July 2022**

***SUBJECTS: Domestic violence; Poverty caused by domestic violence***

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Imagine facing this impossible choice – a life of violence, or one of poverty. Tonight, we look at new research revealing why that’s the reality for too many single mothers, and why leaving abusive relationships can be the hardest choice of all. Welcome to Q+A.

Hello. I’m Virginia Trioli. We’re coming to you live tonight from Sydney. Joining me on the panel: researcher of the report we’ll be discussing tonight, author and renowned feminist Anne Summers; Labor minister and domestic violence survivor Anne Aly; award-winning author and survivor Veronica Gorrie; anti-domestic violence campaigner Arman Abrahamzadeh; and author Jess Hill, who wrote the award-winning book *See What You Made Me Do*. Please make them all feel very welcome.

And remember, you can stream us on iView, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram – #QandA is the hashtag, so please get involved in the discussions.

Our first question tonight comes from Mardi Wilson.

**MARDI WILSON:** So it’s because of men’s use of violence that women are facing this terrible choice between staying in abuse, or poverty and homelessness. Yet the societal message is still so often, “Why doesn’t she just leave?” which places the responsibility with her. So I’m wondering what the panellists think could be done to shift the responsibility from the user of violence...sorry, to the user of violence, and how we could change the normalised narrative that expects women to physically leave the home when they’re in an abusive relationship.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Mardi, thank you. Anne Summers, the massive report that you’ve just published. In it, you talk about the irresponsibility – that’s the phrase you use – the irresponsibility of a society that encourages women to leave violent relationships, but doesn’t provide them with adequate and safe alternatives. That’s pretty much where Mardi’s going this evening, isn’t it?

**ANNE SUMMERS, LEAD RESEARCHER AND TRAILBLAZING AUTHOR:** Yes. I mean, what I try to say in the report and what motivated me to do this work and to do this research was the fact that I felt that the conversation about domestic violence in this country wasn’t going anywhere. That... I mean, Rosie Batty did an incredible job in raising awareness of it. I think the issue is very much on the political agenda, we’re very aware of it, but nothing’s

changed. And I felt one of the reasons that nothing has changed is that the data hasn't changed. We don't know enough about what's happening.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Mm.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** And that is what motivated me to go and do this very in-depth research from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and get never-before-published data about just how bad it really is. Now, the data is mainly about women as victims, and that's what I looked at. There are certainly programs that are, I think, somewhat controversial as to whether or not the woman should stay at home...stay in the home, and the man be made to leave. And that certainly sounds much fairer, but it's often not safer, and it's not practical. So I don't think that is the way...that is not the solution, certainly not the immediate solution.

I mean, the immediate solution facing so many women... The numbers that I have, which are based on the ABS numbers, are that there are 275,000 women in Australia in 2016 – the number is probably about the same now – who live with a violent partner. 275,000. That's a lot of women. 90,000 of them wanted to leave, but couldn't. Many of them because of lack of money. So the ones who did leave and are now single mothers as a result, 185,700 of them who experienced violence, they were all married at the time they were experiencing the violence, but they left and became single mothers, and 50% of them are now living in poverty.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me just spool through a couple of the key findings, and it's a massive and weighty report, but they include the high number of women who experienced violence and are now single mothers with kids under 18, the high number of women who wanted to leave but couldn't because they couldn't afford to, the high number of women who left but came back because they couldn't survive financially, and the women who were not in poverty before they left but were after leaving.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** Mm.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** So it's astonishing. And it's painting a picture and a connection, a nexus, now between domestic violence and poverty that we haven't had before.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** And I think that's probably the main takeaway that I hope people get from this report. And that is that, you know, for a long time it's been...the presupposition has been that violence is the cause of domestic violence, and only poor people suffer it. And it happens in, you know, poor suburbs, and everybody else, you know, if it happens, it's just an occasional thing. That is not the case. I mean, we don't know the incidence via postcode, unfortunately, but I think, if we did know, we'd be very shocked at how high the incidence is regardless of where people live.

What we do know is that leaving a relationship of whatever kind, I mean, some of the people that were looked at in an associated work that was done on HILDA statistics, which are longitudinal ones and give us information over time... Some of the men involved in...that these women who left, were earning up to \$600,000 a year. And those women's income, household incomes, declined by as much as 45% after they left.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me get to the rest of the panel on this, and Mardi's question in particular about expecting women to leave. Anne Aly, I know you've had a particular and personal experience of this, and we're happy to hear whatever you're prepared to share this evening. But what are your reflections on that question?

**ANNE ALY, LABOR MINISTER AND SURVIVOR:** I think, Mardi, to respond to your question, I think we need to be changing that question. It shouldn't... We shouldn't be asking, "Why don't women leave?" We should be asking, "Why do women *have* to leave?" And then we should be asking, "What happens when they leave?" Why do they have to leave? And then, what happens when they leave? If we start asking those two questions as a society, the answers that we'll get are very different to the answer of "Why don't women leave?" I think.

Let me tell you...it is the hardest thing I ever did in my life to leave. And I've done some pretty hard stuff, right? The most difficult thing I ever had to do in my life was leave. Because I had two children. I had two boys. I didn't want them to be without a father. And there's all this society expectation of, you know, children being raised, boys being raised with their father. I knew that I was leaving to lead a life of poverty, and the humiliation of walking into that Centrelink office and saying, "I don't know how I'm going to feed my kids or myself," still sits with me 30 years on. After everything that I went through, the hardest thing was to leave. That's why women don't leave.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me turn to Veronica Gorrie on this. Veronica.

**VERONICA GORRIE, AUTHOR AND SURVIVOR:** I just want to talk about the report, go back to the report. And so, I did read your report, all 101 pages, I believe. And what I took from that was the exclusion of Aboriginal women. There's no data in relation to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women. And also I found that your report was quite gender-biased. We're talking about women being victims right now, but men are also victims as well. And other people from the LGBTQI+ community, however they identify themselves, are victims as well. And your report only...the victim is only the woman. I found that upsetting as well. And, as an Aboriginal person, like, it's a bit... Sorry?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** No, just wait one second. I'll get a response from...

**ANNE SUMMERS:** I was asking Virginia if I could respond to that at some point.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** I'll get a response from Anne in a minute.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** No, I haven't finished yet, Anne. So, with Aboriginal people, we don't... I wish poverty was the only thing we had to worry about when we're dealing with domestic violence. It's not. The violence that we suffer at the hands of police, when police turn up at a domestic violence incident, is a whole 'nother level. Aboriginal women are deemed to be the perpetrators, and are locked up, and our children are taken from us. That's not in your report, which I find upsetting. And although we're not in the report, the federal government have announced an action plan to address family violence and domestic violence within our communities, without no data. And that's very telling. It's state-sanctioned violence.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Veronica, we've got a number of questions that take us to all of those points.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Yeah.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** So I hope to flesh them out as the evening goes on. And I will come back to you for a response in a moment, if I can, Anne. But, Arman, let me come to you, and our question about women leaving, because we may get to your personal story a little bit later in the program. But how would you respond to Mardi?

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH, ANTI-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAMPAIGNER:** I think the way Minister Aly responded...

## **ANNE ALY**

Anne. Please call me Anne.

## **ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH**

Anne.

## **ANNE ALY**

Thank you.

## **ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH**

...responded in terms of what happens to these women when they leave, that's been a key component that's been missing, because we always talk about family and domestic violence and the different fronts that is being fought on. And I think now, with the draft national plan being released, we've got four pillars that have been identified, and that's essentially prevention, the early intervention, the crisis end, but also the recovery, the post-crisis. Now, that's been missing from that conversation for a long time. And, you know, we saw that gap about seven years ago, and that's why we went along in South Australia and established a foundation that actually addresses that gap and tries to assist women in order to carve a brand-new path for themselves, a path that's free of violence and abuse.

## **VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

And there are questions tonight that take us to the issue of post-crisis, and the fact that we've perhaps front-end loaded the issue with warnings and exhortations for women to leave, but not provided them with the support to actually get out. Jess Hill, this question really is fundamental to the book that you wrote.

## **JESS HILL, JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR**

Yeah, Mardi, thanks so much for the question. And when I was writing the book, it was so interesting how ingrained it was in me to foreground the victim that I had to switch around the chapters to put the perpetrators right up front. And that felt very unnatural. And a lot of my learning, and this comes particularly from victim/survivors themselves over the time, has been to try to put the perpetrator back at the front of the sentence, you know. That we're talking... Like, it's just good English to put the subject of the sentence at the beginning, rather... You know, so...

And of course, when we're talking in this kind of heterosexual framework, which is sort of where we're talking tonight, because we're thinking about single mothers, you know, we talk a lot about women's safety. We have a women's safety summit. We have a plan for women's safety. We don't have a plan for men's violence. And it's...you know, when you don't have that lens on the actions of perpetrators, all you see is the resulting choices and the resulting behaviours. But it doesn't come back to what drove those behaviours. Those behaviours aren't operating in a vacuum, and I think, you know, it's difficult, the thing around, you know, "Why should women leave?"

I mean, part of...one of the big awakenings I had when I finally got over all my own stereotypes was I just came to think, "How on Earth *does* she leave, and why...if he treats her so badly and seems to despise her, why doesn't he *let* her leave?" Because, actually, this, when... Especially in terms of coercive control, but in most family violence, it's not just

abuse, it's entrapment. You know, and as Anne says, like, the act of leaving is utterly terrifying. And the women who leave, often...it's a high-stakes operation that takes planning and preparation, because he will not let her leave, and he may kill her for leaving.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me get to some other questions, but, Anne, I'll just give you a moment just to briefly respond, if you can, to Veronica's criticisms.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** I mean, I have no argument with Veronica. The problem with the collection of the statistics that we used, the Personal Safety Survey, which is the federal government's survey every four years of violence and safety in Australia, and which includes domestic violence, does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Why? Why is it?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** Well, the reason they give is they say it's a sampling problem, they can't get to remote communities. It's a household survey. This is their argument. I can't... I'm not defending it. I'm just saying that's what they...what the situation is. Similarly with LGBT...

**VERONICA GORRIE:** I don't believe that. It's because we don't matter, our lives don't matter, that they don't give a shit about Aboriginal people. They don't give a shit about Aboriginal victims. And I'm not bringing gender into it either, like you want to, Jess. It's not about men or women, and women come in all forms, OK, you know? But they don't care about Aboriginal...

**ANNE SUMMERS:** I did... Well, I made the point that that was a criticism...

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Yeah.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** ...and I criticised that point in what I wrote. Similarly with LGBTQ people, who are included in the latest study, haven't been included in previous studies. So the study itself is evolving. This idea for having a separate plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is... I don't know, I don't know that I agree with that. I think I'm interested in what you think of that, whether or not they should be integrated into the national survey, I think is the way to go.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** I think we can do our own survey, actually, and we can look after our own problems.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Well, we'll get to some questions particularly to that in just a moment.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** But you want to be included in the national data?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Anne, let me just go to some other questions...

**ANNE SUMMERS:** Sorry. Sorry.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** ...because we have so many people in the room who have questions for you. And I can't tell you how many painful and shocking first-person stories we received for this program, so many of which we can't share with you for legal reasons. But let me bring in Janine Rees now. Janine, just give us a picture of what life's been like for you.

**JANINE REES:** Thank you. I'm a survivor of an abusive relationship. I thought the hardest thing I'd ever do was to leave, but the abuse escalated exponentially after leaving. My three

children and I couch-surfed for five months. We had to pay six months' rent up front to secure a rental, which was every cent I had left. I now pay more in rent than I would in mortgage repayments in my own home. There is zero practical financial, legal, housing or police help for survivors like my children and I. There is no accountability for perpetrators, as Jess points out. I did not choose to be abused, and I did not choose poverty.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Veronica, I want to turn to you on that. When it was your moment and your opportunity to leave as well – and you've been through, you know, some dreadful violence in your life as well – how impoverishing was that for you?

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Well, just being an Aboriginal person, it's...it's inherent. You're brought into this world black and broke, you know. And, you know, it's due to colonisation. Prior to colonisation, my people had an abundance on this...on our traditional lands. So I blame everything on colonisation. But I want to talk about your report, Anne. In terms of poverty, you don't mention the welfare card, the cashless welfare card that a lot of my people are forced to apply...use. And they, like... You're talking... You know, they so much as... They don't have any cash to spend, you know? Like, how do we fix that? Do you have that in your report?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** No, I don't, 'cause I only talk about government payments.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** That is a government payment, Anne.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** I think it's a legitimate criticism that I didn't talk about that, but, you know, I had to make choices about what I included, and I made my focus the payments that most people are eligible for or try to apply for when they leave a relationship.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Anne Aly, let me turn to you on that question, or just on the story that Janine tells there, and about the poverty that you immediately slot yourself into.

**ANNE ALY:** Yeah, it's... I think it's always front of mind when you're thinking about leaving. And, you know, you think about leaving not once, not twice, but you think about leaving a lot. And you try to imagine what life is going to be like on your own as a single mum, and how you're going to make ends meet. I wasn't working. I had just...I had a three-year-old and a one-year-old. And, you know, when you have to put half your shopping back at the grocery store when you're going through the checkout, when you go to the bank and your bank balance is minus \$6, and you don't know...you don't know how you're going to feed your kids, you cannot help but kind of blame yourself and think that you put them in that situation because you couldn't handle being hit. You couldn't handle the abuse.

And, you know, I've...since I've spoken publicly about my own experiences, I have been incredibly privileged by having a lot of women come and disclose to me and talk about their experiences as well. And the similarities in women's experiences, you know, no matter what background they come from, no matter, you know, where they've come from or no matter how they left, is quite...quite telling that we should know this stuff.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Arman, let me come to you, because you've got a personal story which is very well known to a lot of Australians, the extremely violent death of your mother at the hands of your father, and in a public place. But you grew up in a violent household long before that happened as well.

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** We did. We did. I've got two sisters. And I guess the violence and abuse that happened at home was a normal thing, so you just don't question it. It's like having a meal. You don't question having breakfast or lunch or doing anything normal like that. It was part of life. But I guess things got to a point where we were essentially threatened

to be killed in our own family home. And from there, we...within a matter of 48 hours, we kind of planned and knew roughly what we were going to do.

But I guess you...you know, up until that point, we thought that we had some challenges, but it was when we left our family home, or when we fled the family home, that we started to realise that, "Gee, the challenges are out there now." When we left our family home, my mum didn't have a lot of family here, didn't have any family here. My dad's got a big family here. And so we started to realise that we were isolated. We started sleeping in the car, and we were homeless, so...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** We're just showing a photograph of your mum and your sister there to everyone who's watching, just to pay tribute to her.

Jess Hill, I just quickly want to go back to Janine in just a moment and check, you know, how you're going now. But these are stories that were incredibly familiar to you and that you replayed as well in your book, too.

**JESS HILL:** Yeah, um... And I just want to also just make a shout-out. Janine is a great advocate and very committed, and there are so many people in this audience. I look around and see so many friendly faces, but also people who have done so much work in this area and who have battled for single mothers from every background for so long.

I think that I want to take just a slightly different tack, and it's prompted by Janine's question, because of the work Janine does. And that is to say that, when you leave violence, it's like, as one very close friend described to me just before coming onto this program, you take a breath for a minute. You take a breath now... (GASPS) I'm coming up from underwater and I'm coming into this new place, right? And then you feel like you've got a breath for the first time. Maybe you're starting to get some perspective about what's happened to you, maybe you've got enough space just to catch that breath. And then the various systems that come in over you just push you back down underwater. And that's everything from Indue to Parents Next, but particularly the family law system.

And when, you know... I receive a lot of correspondence from victim/survivors, I feel very privileged to be in contact with some of the most strategic and loving and intelligent people I've ever met. And what they are put through in the family law system and other systems is unconscionable. And it really is, as Anne states in the report, this is government-induced poverty. It's also government-induced abuse, really – to put it, like, plainly – and in such a way that the very thing that you were stripped of, or that your abuser attempted to strip you of, which is dignity... You make the brave choice to leave, you are going to reclaim that dignity, reclaim it for you, reclaim it for your children, and then that dignity is taken back away. And your children see that not only were you degraded by your partner, but you're being degraded by the government. And the result of that is just catastrophic.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** I've got some questions coming, actually, about payments and about the structured system that you look at very closely in the report, Anne. But I just want to mention here, if this discussion raises any difficult issues for you, the numbers for 1800 RESPECT and the Women's Crisis Line are there on your screen. The Men's Referral Service and Lifeline are also available to you.

Our next question now comes from Leanne Ho.

**LEANNE HO:** Hi. I'm the CEO of Economic Justice Australia. We know from our community legal centres helping victim/survivors with Centrelink issues that it's harder for them to escape violence and find safety without an independent source of income. However, social

security was notably absent from the agenda of last year's Women's Safety Summit and currently not included in the national plan to reduce violence against women and their children. My question for the panel, and particularly Minister Aly, Anne...

**ANNE ALY**

Thank you.

**LEANNE HO**

...is, what will the new Labor government do to ensure that economic security, particularly social security income support, is included in the new national plan?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

Minister?

**ANNE ALY**

Thank you for the question, and thank you for all the wonderful work that you do as well. I know from women in the community that I represent that that kind of work is really essential to their wellbeing and to their recovery. So, thank you. You know, I would hope that the national plan would look at the before, during and after leaving. And that after leaving is the really important part that we're talking about here, that after women leave as single mothers, they're plunged into poverty, they have all of these systems against them. The family court system retraumatizes and retraumatizes them. So I would hope that the report does that.

I think it's been made very clear by ministers responsible, Amanda Rishworth and Tony Burke, that a Labor government is committed to doing more in this space. Introducing the domestic and family violence paid leave, for example, which I know personally, from my own experience, walking into my boss's office and saying, "I think I'm going to have to go to a refuge tonight," and him saying, "Well, what, does that mean you're not coming to work tomorrow?" that that is going to make a huge difference for women who are at that point.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

Can I just jump in there, though? 'Cause we did hear from Amanda Rishworth today that JobKeeper is going to stay at \$46 a day, and yet tax cuts will still go through to the highest-paid workers here in Australia of around about, you know...being paid now a break of \$25 a day. We know you survived domestic violence. You lived as a single mother in borderline poverty. You, surely, can't believe that it has to stay there.

**ANNE ALY**

I can... Honestly, I could not live on \$46 a day.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

I'm sorry, I think I may have said JobKeeper. JobSeeker – that's what I meant to say.

**ANNE ALY**

And I couldn't raise two children on \$46 a day, right?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** So, Amanda Rishworth, she...

**ANNE ALY:** But there are other payments. But I couldn't have done it without other payments. I couldn't have done it without things like rental assistance, with the family assistance, with affordable and quality child care, for example, to look after my children...

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** \$140 a day.

**ANNE ALY:** ...and educate my children. I couldn't have done it without all of those other supports that are available. But coming back to the national plan, my hope for the national plan is that it will look forward. I mean, we started this conversation saying that the national plan doesn't look at what happens after women leave, doesn't look at that poverty piece.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** OK...

**ANNE ALY:** My hope is that it will.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Well, we should talk more than hopes, I think. And Anne Summers, you know, you are explicit in the report in identifying payments that are inadequate and that also force women, you know, onto lower payments. Tell the Minister this evening, what should be increased? What actually is going to be part of the solution to what you've uncovered in the data?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** Well, certainly the recommendations – (CLEARS THROAT) excuse me – to my report, the number one recommendation is that single parents, and including single mothers, of course, should be taken off JobSeeker immediately and put back onto the Parenting Payment, regardless of the age of their child, until the child is 16.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Hear, hear.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** I also argue that the Parenting Payment is inadequate and it needs to be raised to the level of the single Age Pension. And that would bring it to something like about \$980 a fortnight...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Mm.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** ...which is a good \$300 or \$400 more than they're currently getting. Still not a lot of money, but certainly more likely to be able to eat on it than current payments. So, I mean, they're my main recommendations. They're very specific, and governments could do them tomorrow if they chose to. And they're not that expensive compared with some of the other things, particularly...

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Can I just jump in, Virginia?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Jump in, yeah.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** With your recommendation, does that... Do you suggest that Aboriginal women, single women, who have just left violent relationships, be taken off the Indue cards?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** I don't mention that.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** That's not a recommendation?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** No, it's not.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Oh, wow.

**ANNE ALY:** We're abolishing the Indue card.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Huh?

**ANNE ALY:** The Labor government is abolishing the Indue card.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** When? When this is going to happen?

**ANNE ALY:** I think it's in train.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Righto. Also just a suggestion – the Labor government should defund the police. Give that money to the community organisations. Defund prisons that are incarcerating my people. I just want to mention, whilst I've got the space, right now, Aboriginal youths are being removed from Banksia Youth Detention Centre in Western Australia and being incarcerated in maximum security in an adult prison right now. Defund the prisons, abolish prisons and defund the police.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let's get to our next question now. And it comes from one Vandana Arora.

**VANDANA ARORA:** I moved to Australia eight years back, and I'm from India. Imagine you're in a relationship with someone who is exerting total financial coercive control over you as you live here alone, several hours away from any family in India, in a culture that venerated men, or at the very least, women with children, and you are someone who is traumatised after a devastating miscarriage. What is Australia doing for migrants as myself, from India and Asia, especially women in abusive relationships, to help them live with the stigma and erosion of self-esteem? What am I to tell other women in Australia and about Australia – that it let me down or rallied me to get me on my feet and supported me?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Thanks for your question. Arman, I want to turn to you first on that.

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** Yeah, I think that layer of cultural and linguistic diversity is one that we're...I guess, you know, from my experiences, we're still trying to sort of understand. And the services that are out there, some of them do a great service, and obviously address the needs, but there's a little bit more work that needs to be done in that space, I think.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Minister?

**ANNE ALY:** In 2007, I wrote a report entitled *No Place To Go*, and that was about culturally and linguistically diverse women in Western Australia and domestic violence. That was 15 years ago, and nothing has changed.

**VANDANA ARORA:** Yes.

**ANNE ALY:** You are absolutely right, and I want to raise two issues here. The first one is women on partner visas who are being abused – whether it's coercive control or whether it's violence – and the lack of services for them because they are not citizens. And the second one is the Hague Convention. Right now, we have Australian women fleeing abusive relationships from overseas, coming home to the safety of Australia. The Hague

Convention... If they get "Hagued", if the other partner raises the Hague Convention, he gets all of his legal fees paid by Australia, and the Hague Convention does not recognise family and domestic violence as a grave danger to the child. We are returning women to abusive relationships, to abusive situations. 80% of Hague cases now are women fleeing domestic violence.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Are there any changes or any legislation that your government's considering in order to counter this?

**ANNE ALY:** Mark Dreyfus, the Attorney-General, has committed to reviewing the Hague Convention. All it needs is a change to the Family Law Act, to the part about the Hague Convention, to ensure that magistrates and judges and courts take into account family and domestic violence as a factor in returning a child and a mother to an abusive relationship. This comes on the tail of... In 2008, a woman named Cassandra Hasanovic was returned from Australia to an abusive relationship in the UK. A year later, she was dead.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Jess, I actually just wanted to bring in an observation I know that you've made in the past about the culture of equal-share parenting in family law vastly reducing women's abilities to make safe decisions.

**JESS HILL:** Mm.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** And I'm pretty sure that a lot of that comes into the challenges particularly faced by culled women. That's at the heart of a lot of the problems here too, isn't it?

**JESS HILL:** Absolutely. Equal...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** It's an assumption in our jurisdiction and in our society that actually is the best outcome, of course, for everyone.

**JESS HILL:** Yeah, precisely.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Is it an incorrect one?

**JESS HILL:** And it... Basically, what's happened over the past...particularly since 2006 and the Howard reforms... You know, that year, the Howard government sure took a sledgehammer to the independence of women and their children in so many ways, but particularly with the Family Law Act and the presumption of equal-share parental responsibility, but also the introduction of a provision that no longer exists, but still, I think, exists in the culture of the court, which was the hostile parent provision, which was later termed 'the victim's dilemma', which was to say that, if you raise abuse allegations, you are getting in the way of meaningful contact between the parent and the child. And so the reason why I bring that up is that this presumption of equal-share parental responsibility, what it's done has...it has changed the court from a place in which child safety was a priority to a place where contact must be arranged and allegations of violence are inconvenient and get in the way of that contact.

We know from coronial inquests – the Hannah Clarke coronial inquest – the role that equal-share parental responsibility and the expectation of that that women have and that...you know, and that their partners have, can lead women to make unsafe choices about, you know, providing access, 'cause they're afraid they'll be taken to family court. I spoke to a woman who's now a magistrate – she was a barrister at the time – and she stayed in her marriage for 10 years because she knew...she stayed there as a supervisor, 'cause she knew

she could not trust the family law system to protect her child, and that there was every chance that that child would be ordered into shared custody arrangements.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me just quickly go back to you, if I can, Vandana. Do you feel that Australia has let you down?

**VANDANA ARORA:** I don't think so. I've had a number of really, really good friends and family, the legal system – they've all really rallied behind me to put me back on my feet. However, the justice has been long and slow and arduous, so that's something which I'm a little disappointed with. I did not get justice in my court case. I walked away from \$7 million because I chose to live a life of peace that I want to live. I want to live and I want to sleep peacefully at night.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Vandana, thanks for being here...

**ANNE ALY:** Can I just make a point here?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Yes, just quickly, Anne.

**ANNE ALY:** When I went to the judge to seek a restraining order after I had been beaten black and blue, the judge looked at me and he said, "Do you really want this? Surely your culture has ways of dealing with this."

**VANDANA ARORA:** I was told that too, Minister.

**ANNE ALY:** That cultural excuse persists. That cultural defence persists.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me move on to our next question now, and it's a video one. It comes from Katrina Harrison.

**KATRINA HARRISON, BAIRNSDALE, VIC, GUNAIKURNAI COUNTRY:** My name's Katrina Harrison. I'm a strong Palawa woman. I've had years of family violence, and now I work in the sector. It's traumatic to live with family violence, but it's even more so traumatic to be forced to walk through a broken, racist system. My question is, what will it take to support women escaping violence, particularly Aboriginal women?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Veronica, let's get you to answer that question.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Well, first, we've got to stop police misidentifying us as perpetrators. So, we don't have... As Aboriginal victims, we don't have the luxury of forethinking the process of family courts. We're also thinking about our criminal matters as well, from being incarcerated – wrongfully incarcerated.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Yeah, and you've made a really interesting point in the past, actually, Veronica...

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Yeah.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** ...about how Aboriginal women are often seen in that...in a situation of leaving, fleeing or complaining of family violence, as a bad victim. What do you mean by, you know, the 'bad victim'?

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Well, we're not good victims. We're not believed. And I think it's 'cause...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** You're not the right kind of victim.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Yeah, we're not the right... We're not the white victim. White is right, right? But also, I want to raise the case, and I'll use this as an example... Tamica Malloway?

**JESS HILL:** Mullaley? Yeah.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** And you know this case. It was on your show in episode two, *See What You Made Me Do*. You know, while I appreciate that you brought that...her particular story attention – the media attention that it deserved – because all too often, you don't hear about the incidences that are happening to Aboriginal people because we don't make the news...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Veronica, can I take you back to the question? As someone who knows this area well, who's worked as a police officer, who's escaped family violence, who's been in...come from a family...a place of violence yourself as a young person, what are the policy changes you would like to see? What are the settings changes that your community need?

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Well, in relation to Aboriginal people, we don't want police coming to us. We don't even call police, for Christ's sakes, because we know the likelihood of us getting arrested is really high. So... And usually the first people we ring or telephone when we have crisis is our family anyway, and that's cultural. So, I think more money should be given to Aboriginal organisation that's culturally appropriate, that we trust. In Victoria right now, we have Djirra. That's a family violence – Aboriginal family violence-led – organisation. And we have a men's healing one that addresses the...in some cases, the perpetrators, and that's Dardi Munwurro. So, more funding should be provided to these Aboriginal organisations.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** As an example of what you're speaking about, I know that, in your personal history, your child, I think, was handed to the partner you were fleeing...

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Yeah.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** ...and was taken off with...with the partner.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Yeah, he was, 'cause, obviously, I didn't make a good victim, but... And people who have never experienced family violence is that, when you're in a relationship and you've been forced to be submissive, compliant and you're seen and not heard, that when you...when police do attend, in particular when it's Aboriginal people – and by the way, I wasn't calling the police, they were called to the situation – it's our...we take that opportunity to speak up. And so we're seen to be hysterical, we're seen and deemed to be suffering from a mental illness and we're treated like shit and our children are taken from us.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** We've heard from many of you in particularly vulnerable communities, and we want to represent as many voices as we can tonight, so our next question comes from Kat Reed.

**KAT REED:** Hi, everyone. I am a board member of Women With Disabilities Australia and the CEO of Women With Disabilities ACT. And we know, across Australia, women and girls with disability experience significantly higher forms of all forms of violence than non-disabled women, including many that remain legal and state-sanctioned, such as forced sterilisation and other forms of reproductive violence. While Australia has policies, frameworks and

services to address violence against women, many of these use narrow definitions of domestic and family violence, which means that women with disability, and the types of gender-based violence we experience, are excluded. My question for the panel tonight is, how can we ensure that women with disability are meaningfully included, and the forms of gender-based violence we experience, including domestic and family violence, are addressed?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

Thanks for that question. Anne Summers, I'll turn to you on that.

**ANNE SUMMERS**

Well, this is something that I do raise in my report, and one of the most disturbing figures, in fact, in the report is the rate of disability amongst women who have experienced physical and sexual violence. The rate is – just must check it – is 45% of the women in this survey suffered a physical or an intellectual disability compared with 18% for the entire population. One of the questions that I ask, and can't be answered from this, 'cause this is a cross-sectional survey... It only surveys, gets information, from a certain point of time. It doesn't give you what happened before and what happened after. But the extent of the disability is so severe, particularly the physical disability, and it seems to me it correlates so closely with the descriptions of physical violence that are meted out towards women in these family situations, that there has to be a cause and effect there. So, I think that we need urgent study and urgent investigation into the extent to which the disabilities are the result of domestic violence. They also can then become a cause of domestic violence because we know that women who experience disabilities are then... Often, that triggers violence in their partner, even if he's the person – or even particularly if he's the person – who has caused the disability in the first place. So, I think it's a really hugely important issue and it's one that needs to be investigated.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

And we'll need sort of formal data collection and tracking in order to make sure that the extent of the injury is known and that the numbers are actually counted.

**ANNE SUMMERS**

Yes.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

Yeah. Let me move on to our next question. It comes from Gerard Dewhurst.

**GERARD DEWHURST**

Studies around the world show that domestic violence in same-sex and/or queer couples have similar or higher rates than heterosexual couples. How can Australia even begin to address this when our most recent census continued the long legacy of excluding us?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI**

Jess Hill, can I turn to you on that one?

**JESS HILL:** Yeah, it's shocking. I can't believe that, in 2022, we had a census without actually tracking the data of that, especially... It's, you know... This is not sort of a small community. I think it's something like...there's data that's around 10% of Australians will identify as LGBTQIA+. And you're right. And the studies on the prevalence of violence, also the... It ranges so widely that it's hard to sort of sit on a number. Really, when we're talking about family violence, intimate partner violence, coercive control, we're talking about a system of power over, and that system can be established by anyone. In heterosexual couples, when it's a real system of coercive control, it tends to be more the male who does that over the female. When there's aggression, it can be much more equal. But in LGBTQIA+ relationships, establishing that power over is just as achievable and it is just as prevalent, as you say.

And, really, I tend to take... I know this is a very outdated word, but it's come back into vogue. I tend to... Rather than look at just the gendered nature of violence, I look at the patriarchal nature of violence. And I think, sometimes, when we look at gender equality as the framework through which we're trying to reduce violence, whilst that can have some knock-on positive effects for people in that community, really, we're missing the bigger picture. Gender inequality is a symptom of patriarchy. And under, as, you know, bell hooks puts it, like, white, capitalist, heteronormative – there's a few other words in there – patriarchy, that system of power over is implicit and ingrained in the culture.

And there's so many different ways in which power over is achieved in those relationships. Some of them bear a lot of resemblance to heterosexual relationships, but there are often, you know, unique traits, like threatening to out someone, threatening to disclose an HIV status, or even just the threat of exclusion from a community that, even in Sydney, is tight. And once you're excluded, the exile and isolation...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** OK.

**JESS HILL:** ...is intense.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me get to some other questions. Our next one comes from Ian Lawton.

**IAN LAWTON:** Thank you, yeah. The panel have spoken quite a bit tonight about poverty, and I want to put the idea of early intervention into a broader context, and that is generational. So, I wonder if the panel has any suggestions for how we could do better, as a society, at supporting family networks in breaking the cycles of violence?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Arman, let me turn to you on this, because you've said something that really shocked me when I learnt of your reflections on this, given what you grew up with and what your father did to your mother. And you said that if your dad hadn't killed your mother, that you probably would have turned out to be a different person. What do you mean?

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** Well, I think I got to a point where, when we fled our family home, I was about 21, and I started to very slowly piece the...connect the dots, essentially, and look at our situation and how we ended up and why we ended up in the situation that we were in. And it was all... I guess, you know, it was all related to the 21 years of controlling behaviour and manipulation, financial abuse, emotional abuse. All of that sits underneath. And I guess, you know, the attempted murder and the murder is really at the top of the iceberg – that's what we hear about in the media...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Sure.

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** ...that's what we see, that's what we count. It wasn't until my mum passed away that I started to realise that some of the traits that I'd picked up from watching my parents interact and the way my dad acted – what he said, how he went about his business – I started to copy that. And I'd been doing that since my teenage years, and I could clearly see that in the relationships that I was in. So, I guess I noticed that all of that abuse, the 20 years of abuse, essentially, led to my dad killing my mum. And so...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Are you saying that, if that dreadful murder hadn't taken place, that you might have grown up to be an abuser yourself?

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** An emotional abuser, someone that was jealous, controlling, manipulative, yes.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** So...

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** I saw that in my early relationships and I had to reflect and say, "This is not the right path. Just because I've been exposed to it, and that's just because it happened in my family home, doesn't mean that...doesn't make it right."

**VERONICA GORRIE:** I don't think that's proven, though. Is it proven? Look, 'cause my son's witnessed a lot of violence towards me, and he is an amazing Aboriginal man.

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** He's reflected.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Is, like...is this...? Is it proven?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** I think...

**VERONICA GORRIE:** That if you, as a child, if you witnessed so much violence...?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Well, I think this is... This is Arman's experience, though, of how...

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Oh, OK.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** ...how he believed he was turning out as a result of this. So, Arman, what did you do? I mean, because I know that you're a father now with a young child, so...

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** I am. So, what did I do? I guess, in my teenage years, I started to – as relationships weren't working out – I started to reflect and look at who was at fault and what went wrong. And as I started to grow up, I started to actually understand that what was happening at home, I was essentially replicating that.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Mm.

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** And as I said, all the different forms of abuse that I had witnessed and experienced, I was recreating that in my own relationships. And so I think I got to a point where I started to realise that if I keep going down this path, chances are I'm either going to hurt my partner or do even worse. And when I saw what my dad did to my mum... That didn't happen overnight. My dad didn't just get up one night and say, "I'm going to go and kill this lady." That didn't happen overnight. It took 22 years.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Yeah.

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** From my perspective, it was 22 years of abuse. And even that – it started with very subtle behaviours, and as time went on, it started to build up.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** What do you tell younger people or people who might be in a similar situation to you – that you were in – as a young man? What advice, what leadership do you give to them on this?

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** Look out for early warning signs. And just because something is happening at home, that doesn't necessarily make it right. For me, I had my friends and their families, and that's where I, essentially, started to compare that what was happening at home – at my house – and what was happening in my friends' family places were two different things.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Anne, you had young children. How did you make sure that you were interrupting the cycle with that generation?

**ANNE ALY:** I protected my children fiercely. My boys didn't know anything about what I went through until they read it in my book a couple of years ago. They had no idea. I protected them fiercely.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** What was their response when they read it?

**ANNE ALY:** They rang me and they said, "Why didn't you tell us?" And I said, "Because I didn't want you to be a part of that world. I didn't want you to know." But, you know, I think there are... The other night, I was having dinner with a girlfriend, and, inevitably, whenever I'm having dinner with a girlfriend, we end up talking about domestic violence. And she looked at me and she said, "What are we going to do, Anne?" And I said, "Do you know what? Do you reckon the men are sitting around, halfway through their steak, putting down their knife and fork and going, 'What are we going to do about domestic violence?'" I think men need to start having the conversation with men a lot more.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me go to our next question now. And it comes from Tara Hunter.

**TARA HUNTER:** So, the US Supreme Court decision overturning Roe v. Wade has meant abortion is now illegal for many Americans. It's likely that domestic violence perpetrators will use this ruling as part of violence and coercion against their victims. In Australia, we know that abortion still sits in the criminal code in Western Australia, and we also know that it's inaccessible for many people due to the cost and the location. So, just interested in thoughts around how we support people who are affected by reproductive coercion.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Can I come to you on that first, Veronica?

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Could you repeat it? 'Cause I've lost the mic and I can't hear.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Oh, no...

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Just repeat...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let me help you. Absolutely. It's about the Roe v. Wade decision in the United States, the Supreme Court decision, and how there can be better support for victim/survivors of reproductive coercion, people who have been forced to carry children to term that they didn't want to carry in the first place. And I guess to ensure that it doesn't actually happen over here in Australia as it has in America.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** You hear about those cases where women are in violent relationships and they're told not to take any...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Birth control.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** ...birth control. And I think that's a way of keeping them in that relationship by getting them pregnant and then making them feel like they need to be – have both...the child needs both parents.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Mm.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** So, that's happening. But it's really sad what's happening over in the US at the moment. It's pretty much a dictatorship. And for the women over there, or anyone that's...have uteruses, it's like they don't have autonomy over their own body part.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** I want to ask Anne Summers. You're a close watcher of American politics, you spent a long time there, and you've worked out of the highest office in the land here, as an adviser to Paul Keating. Is it possible that this sort of anti-abortion push could actually take fire here in Australia?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** Well, I would like to think not, and I do think there are such significant differences between the two countries. I mean, abortion has always been, you know, at least for the last 50 years, an issue that has divided Americans in ways that are quite incomprehensible in this country. I mean, in this country, it's something like 70% or 80% of people believe abortion should be legal and available. So, that's not to deny that there are issues of access, particularly in large states like Queensland and Western...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** And affordability.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** And affordability. Though it is covered by Medicare in most situations, I believe. There's also access to RU486, to nonsurgical forms of abortion, increasingly. And that is...that's helpful. But I think the problem with the United States is that – and the thing that makes me so, kind of, angry about it – is that the Republicans have been saying for 50 years they were going to do this. And then they made it a litmus test in all their judicial appointments – local courts, federal courts, Supreme Court. They finally got the Supreme Court. They made it a litmus test in the preselection of all their Members of Parliament...Members of Congress, state, local, federal level. They said, "We're going to do it." And they've done it. And...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** So why should anyone be surprised?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** Why didn't we stop it? Why didn't we stop it? I mean, I just...I'm just baffled by the attitude of the Democrats and their inability to match the Republicans' evil intent. I just find it extraordinary. But I do not think that the same thing would happen in Australia. I don't.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Anne Aly, do you?

**ANNE ALY:** I just wanted to go back to something that Kat said, because Kat made a very important point here, where she said the narrow definition of family and domestic violence. And if we look at coercive control, that needs to be in the definition of family and domestic violence. Financial control, including, and as well, control that forces women to carry to term children that...whether it's through a rape or whatever. I think that if we were to... If we want

to talk about prevention, we do really need to broaden what we talk about when we talk about family and domestic violence, incorporate all of those different forms of abuse in it.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** So, reproductive coercion should actually be included as a term?

**ANNE ALY:** I think...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** As a recognised form of abuse?

**ANNE ALY:** I think, yeah. I think we need to look at... I think...

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Is that something that we need to include in the government's policy?

**ANNE ALY:** I've just had that idea now, so maybe I'll... Thanks, Kat!

**VERONICA GORRIE:** An ideas person, eh?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Jess, did you want to jump in there?

**JESS HILL:** Oh, I just want, you know... I think there's some data in Anne's report that talks about the fact that, for so many women – and I'm sorry the number fails me, but it might not fail you, Anne – that... you know, that pregnancy is the first time violence occurs. And there is... There was a woman in the book that I wrote who talked about, she'd had a really supportive partner, believed in her independence and gender equality. And then the day she announced that she was pregnant, he turned on a dime and became one of the most terrifying coercive controllers and users of physical and sexual violence that I've practically ever heard. Now, there are so many... You know, a lot of people felt like, "Well, why would you have a baby to him? Why would you do that?" It's, like, for a lot of women, they won't even find out that their partner is emotionally or physically or sexually abusive until they are pregnant.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** And there's resounding yeses in the room. So, clearly lived experience of that.

**ANNE SUMMERS:** Yeah. And why is this? And why does this happen?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** And what drives that?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** What drives that, and how do we stop it?

**JESS HILL:** Mm.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let's go to our final question tonight. It comes from Robyn Evans.

**ROBYN EVANS:** Thank you. As a representative of BaptistCare, who provides wraparound support services to victims, and behaviour change and case management services to perpetrators of domestic and family violence, we are interested to know how services helped or hindered the process of change. What made a difference? What can we do better?

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** So, let's go around the panel on that, about the existing services like BapCare and others. Have they been helpful or not? And what could they do better in order to move...to pick up the conversation that Anne has kicked off with this research, and to actually make a difference? Jess, I'll start with you.

**JESS HILL:** Look, it's broad, because services are so broad, and there's everything from the best and most, you know, sensitive to the worst and retraumatizing. I'd say... One thing I would just offer is to really pay attention not just to children, but individual children in each family. They all have vastly different experiences, and may be facing violence from siblings. They... I just think really paying attention to kids is the best...you know, the best thing services could do.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Arman? We'll take one suggestion from each of you, given time is tight.

**ARMAN ABRAHIMZADEH:** Mm-hm. I think engaging with men a little bit better, because men are... I mean, look at this panel – I'm the only man here speaking about domestic violence. But engaging with men more meaningfully and trying to genuinely engage them in a conversation. That's probably what I would say.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Veronica?

**VERONICA GORRIE:** I've forgotten the question. Sorry. Repeat it again? Sorry!

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** About how service providers who are working in this space to try and help victims of family abuse...what they can do better.

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Give victims more money to help them survive. It's not a Band-Aid approach. Don't just fix it for the day, fix them for the future. Give them more money. And I know it's out of your hands, you're limited for what you guys can do. You know, set women, or the families, up to succeed and not to fail.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Anne Aly.

**ANNE ALY:** All of those.

**AUDIENCE:** (APPLAUDS)

**VERONICA GORRIE:** Yeah. Thank you. (CHUCKLES)

**ANNE ALY:** All of those things. And not... Be responsive to cultural and linguistic needs, particularly cultural needs of women from different cultural or religious backgrounds.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Anne Summers?

**ANNE SUMMERS:** Well, I'd certainly agree with everything that's been said, but the other thing I'd add is that we spend all our time studying women. All of my research is based on abuse of women. And it's very important that we understand the extent, the depth of that and how much worse it is than we thought it was. And I hope that these terrible numbers will prompt some attention in Canberra. But what we don't study are perpetrators, and I really think that we must have more...we need to know more about these men – who they are, why they do it, how they do it. We need longitudinal studies that follow these guys so we understand it better.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** And that's all that we have time for tonight. So please thank our wonderful panel: Anne Summers, Anne Aly, Veronica Gorrie, Arman Abrahimzadeh, and Jess Hill. And thank you for your questions and for sharing such personal stories with us, and to you at home for joining the conversation as well. And we should point out that Anne's full report can be found on our website.

Now, as we end the program, while we've been talking, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resignation appears imminent. He's just about to give a speech at any moment, and he's expected to announce that he's quitting as Conservative Party leader. So stay...

**AUDIENCE:** (CHEERS, APPLAUDS)

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** No comment from me on that! Stay across ABC News services for updates throughout this evening, and of course all our news services tomorrow morning, with the latest.

And next week, our program, coincidentally, will focus on foreign affairs, and David Speers will be with you, looking at how Australia's international relationships are shaping up under an Albanese government. So, he'll be joined by Ukrainian Ambassador to Australia Vasyl Myroshn... I knew I'd get this wrong! Vasyl Myroshnychenko, academic and author Kylie Moore-Gilbert, who spent two years in an Iranian jail, and strategic studies expert Hugh White.

And you can join me tomorrow morning on ABC Radio Melbourne. So, goodnight, go well.

**[ENDS]**

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**THE HON DR ANNE ALY MP**  
**Minister for Early Childhood Education**  
**Minister for Youth**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**  
**TELEVISION INTERVIEW**  
**ABC NEWS AUSTRALIA, AFTERNOON BRIEFING WITH GREG JENNETT**  
**WEDNESDAY, 26 APRIL 2023**

***SUBJECTS: Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme changes; Pressures to increase the JobSeeker rate; Gas price capping.***

**GREG JENNETT, HOST:** Well, this is the point in the program where we were hoping to bring in our political panel of the day with the intention that Anne Aly, the Member for Cowan, and Minister for Early Childhood and Education might be able to join us. Anne's out and about in Newcastle today.

Alas, she has not been able to make a connection yet. That means that we are with Nationals MP and Coalition frontbencher, Barnaby Joyce, flying solo. You'll just have to contend with me today, Barnaby.

**BARNABY JOYCE:** All to myself.

**JENNETT:** So sorry about that, I can't really make up for Anne Aly.

**JOYCE:** Debating the ABC as if you're the Labor Party I'm quite used to.

**JENNETT:** I'll take on the challenge, thank you. I want to actually start with Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme changes, they've been announced by Mark Butler.

We've heard on the program when this first started to arise as a bit of a rumour last week that the effects would be profound in regional Australia. Now, we've got the design of it, why so?

**JOYCE:** Well, let's see how it rolls out, but of course in regional Australia with the dispensing fees it's incredibly important. People who are doing it tough not only have to pay for, you know, if there's changes in what they have to pay at the chemist, but they also have to drive to the chemist to get them and drive back, and it's greater distances and generally, to be quite frank, in regional areas the cars - people are poorer - the cars aren't as good as they would be in city areas, so all round it ramps up the cost.

Now, to be quite frank, I want to see all the details before I sort of cast judgment on their changes to the PBS. The PBS is an incredible system for Australia; allows people access to life-saving drugs that they otherwise just wouldn't be able to afford. And the classic one around here is melanoma drug. A script's about \$37 if you had to buy it, I think it's something inordinate, you know, it's \$140,000 a year or something like that, which means just a lot of people their alternative is to die.

**JENNETT:** You say that it ramps up the cost, but mathematically on paper if you are needing to go to the GP and then the pharmacist after that less often, well, exactly half as often, you'd be saving money, wouldn't you, on the trip, on the fuel, on the repetition of the purchases?

**JOYCE:** If there's an extension of what pharmacists are allowed to do, then I think we'll find ourselves in support of that. I think it's a good idea. I think that the pharmacists, for basic scripts, like a repeat of the pill or something like that, I don't understand why people need to go to a doctor to get a script for the bleeding obvious.

So if the changes are going down that path and, you know, I can't talk for shadow Cabinet but, you know, personally I believe that that would be a smart move and, you know, one if that's the direction they're going in, I'd commend them for.

**JENNETT:** Yeah, well, I think initially, at least as it's been outlined, they are specifically drugs for people with chronic conditions. I don't know whether it covers some of those that you've mentioned, but that will become clear in time.

Job Seeker, Barnaby Joyce - we're seeing Labor backbenchers, joining many others from civil society in saying now is the time. Now is the time to increase the rate. Why not?

**JOYCE:** Well, in everything they do, I mean, welcome to government, Labor Party and the Greens. If you are going to increase JobSeeker, which I fought for an increase in JobSeeker, under the Coalition we got an increase in JobSeeker, but the more you fight for expenditure in the budget the more you have to find the money to pay for it. And of course that means that you have to have a reality check.

And some of the other ideas, such as closing down coal-fired power stations, closing down - which puts up the price of electricity which reduces the profitability of businesses, which reduces the tax you get, putting pressure on people to export coal, reducing that, of course. That's where, if there's a lucky dip in this budget, it's come from the export of coal and the export of gas. Yet we hear people say that they don't want to export coal or export gas anymore, and that's counterintuitive to earning money, because it's not only the royalties but it's the massive tax bill that these companies pay which is so important to putting money in the budget so you can pay for things such as education, health, and things such as JobSeeker.

**JENNETT:** Right. So your position is you could do it if you could find the revenue to offset it? So, you have no sort of philosophical objection to increasing the JobSeeker rate?

**JOYCE:** Look, I acknowledge 100 per cent that if you're on JobSeeker it's incredibly tough. I'd also say that there's an awful lot of jobs out there, so if you're on JobSeeker, you know, the question should be asked, are you doing your darnedest to try and find a job, because they are there, especially out in regional areas such as here.

But, you know, I'm not an absolute economic sadist. In the past, I've pushed for increases in JobSeeker. We've got them, but I am a realist, and a realist says that if you're going to spend money you have to earn money. And that means you can't say, 'Well, we're going to go on a sort of a climate change, puritanical drive where we close down our coal mines, close down our gas exports, put pressure on farming, put pressure on irrigation', and then somehow magically we find money somewhere else. Because the only magic money, if you close that down, is you borrow it, and then your debt goes through the roof.

**JENNETT:** All right. Well, since you mention it, gas price capping, and I should throw in here by the way, Barnaby Joyce, we may end up being joined by Anne Aly at some point; there's some progress being made behind the scenes here. But you're mentioning energy. So gas price --

**JOYCE:** Hurry up before she gets here.

**JENNETT:** -- gas price capping. Look, it could stay in place until 2025 with the intention that it does secure for East Coast markets the supplies that are needed. You'd adopt a whatever-it-takes approach, wouldn't you, rather than hit a shortage of gas?

**JOYCE:** No. Look, we had the Japanese Ambassador, and he was on Radio National this morning, I do listen to it, and he was saying, 'Look, if you keep on putting these caveats on pricing then they're going to stop investing in trying to find it'. And if they don't find it, we don't

export it, and if they don't export it we don't earn the tax revenue, we don't earn the royalties, and you don't have money for things such as JobSeeker.

So you can't just go into a marketplace and start – in a Socialist way – start putting price caps on things, because money's fungible, and INPEX and people like that, they're one of the biggest sort of gas exporters, or the biggest gas exporter from Australia, will just say, 'Well, if that's what you want to do, Australia, we're going to invest somewhere else'. And we don't want them, we want them to invest here; we want to expand our gas production here.

So once more, things that sound so good in first instance, when you actually drill down on it, you've got an international company, an international board, and they're going to say, 'Well, if that's what the Aussies want to do, good luck to them, but we're not investing there. We'll go and invest over in Central America or in Asia, or other parts around the world'.

Unfortunately, we're not the only country that has gas. There are lots of places; Canada, and everywhere else, they can all find it.

**JENNETT:** They may. Why don't we bring in Anne Aly? Anne, welcome. I think we got over some difficulties and Barnaby and I have been holding up our end of the bargain without you. Why don't we just bring you in on the topic most recently discussed, which is gas price capping, particularly here in eastern Australia. You're in Newcastle today.

Were you surprised to see that the consultation could see this holding out as a mechanism until 2025?

**MINISTER ANNE ALY:** Well, no. Look, we're going through the responsible way of doing this, which is we've opened up the consultations on the mandatory code for gas supply. It's about ensuring a security of gas supply for Australians.

I'll remind your viewers that the price of gas went up by 250 per cent under the Coalition's last term in government.

We have now a Labor government that's committed to looking at energy prices, to looking at gas supply, particularly on the East Coast, I must say, from Western Australia, we don't have those same issues because we have a guaranteed gas supply.

And so, you know, I won't speculate or pre-empt the results of those consultations as we go through on this mandatory Code of Conduct, except to say that we are a government that is taking action to provide security and certainty in the supply of gas, and we are developing and delivering an energy policy where the Coalition failed over dozens of times to deliver any form of energy price relief.

**JENNETT:** Yeah, there's not going to be much blowback on this, on the politics, is there, Barnaby, because those of us who are on the East Coast of Australia are not going to forgive any authority that saw us without energy in 2025? The weight of public opinion is firmly on getting the gas companies to, you know, do what they should do for the country, isn't it?

**JOYCE:** Well, you know, I hear the Labor Party talk about energy security. They promised the \$275 reduction in power; remember that. And then they came into government and the power bills for electricity, which is the basis, which is the food stock for families, one of the biggest issues in the cost of living has gone through the roof.

Then they've got this fig leaf, they say, "Oh, we brought into Parliament this bill, and if you didn't vote for it, then you're responsible for it".

Well, the bill went through the Parliament; through the Lower House, through the Senate, and the power prices went up, dramatically. And they're still going dramatically up. And they're about to shut down Liddell, 1,300 megawatts. It's still going to happen, next few days, the next few days.

Surely if they're so worried about energy they'd be going up to AGL, like myself and Malcolm Turnbull did, and say, 'If you shut it down, we'll divest you of it'. But no, they didn't have the

gumption and they don't have the courage to actually do these things that are so important right now, right now.

The biggest issue for power is supply. If you've got maximum supply, you put pressure on prices to go down, and everything else is just tinsel.

**JENNETT:** Well, I did hear Chris Bowen just saying today that he's had assurances from AEMO that Liddell's closure, you know, won't destabilise the grid. But let's move on.

**JOYCE:** I got them as well; I got them as well from Kerry Schott --

**ALY:** Sorry, sorry.

**JOYCE:** Assurances, assurances of when they closed Hazelwood. Of course it didn't, and the power prices went up.

**ALY:** I'm sorry, Greg, but --

**JOYCE:** Don't put too much money on those [indistinct].

**ALY:** -- it's a bit laudable for Barnaby to talk about guts and courage in doing anything in energy when he was part of a government that did nothing.

**JENNETT:** All right. Why don't we flip over to CPI, to inflation...

**JOYCE:** No actually we did, quite a bit.

**JENNETT:** ...and we've skipped so many topics without you, which is a shame, but anyway, time enough to kick over inflation.

You wouldn't take much comfort, would you, Anne, from inflation coming down, but still sitting as high as 7 per cent annualised. It's going to be a long hard road to pull it down from here.

**ALY:** Oh, absolutely, look, and we're under no disillusion that, you know, the road ahead is hard, and Jim Chalmers has spoken about that, about inflation being one of the greatest issues for our government at the moment, due to a lot of different reasons, including, you know, international and global forces.

But it's encouraging to see that it has started to moderate, as Jim Chalmers has said. A lot of that has to do with a responsible approach to the budget and a responsible approach to spending, and we'll continue along that road to ensure that we do the best that we can to deliver cost of living relief to families, and that we don't put those inflationary pressures on the budget in doing that.

**JENNETT:** And JobSeeker, this is something we discussed with Barnaby earlier in your absence, you've got at least four to five, maybe half a dozen Labor backbenchers breaking ranks now. Do they do that in the knowledge that there is something coming their way or should be, come budget night on JobSeeker?

**ALY:** Well, Greg, we are not the party of lifters and leaners. That is what the Liberal Coalition -- Liberal-National Coalition stand for. Labor principles, Labor values are about looking after our most vulnerable. It's not an easy task; there are difficult decisions to make given the Liberal trillion dollars of debt that we inherited, and the budget booby traps that are in the budget coming up --

**JOYCE:** That's not actually true.

**ALY:** -- there are difficult decisions to make.

**JOYCE:** Yeah.

**ALY:** Barnaby, I'm talking.

**JOYCE:** You've got to hold her to - you've got to hold her to account --

**ALY:** Barnaby, you had your turn.

**JENNETT:** Yeah, Barnaby, you got a fair run before Anne came along.

**ALY:** Yeah. May I please finish?

**JENNETT:** Anne, I'll get you to wrap it up very quickly because we're almost out of time.

**ALY:** Okay. So there are difficult decisions to make but I want everyone to wait and see what's going to happen in the budget. It's less than two weeks away. We'll be delivering cost of living relief to those most vulnerable, because it's in Labor's blood to do that.

**JENNETT:** All right. We're going to thank both of you for an unorthodox sort of configuration today. Not what we expected, but these things...

**JOYCE:** There's not a trillion dollars in debt.

**JENNETT:** ...happen in live broadcasting.

**JOYCE:** -- we won't go through a trillion dollars until the Labor Party's in.

**JENNETT:** Barnaby Joyce, you did just fine by yourself, and Anne, thanks for pulling out all stops to join.

**[ENDS]**

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**THE HON DR ANNE ALY MP**  
**Minister for Early Childhood Education**  
**Minister for Youth**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**  
**TELEVISION INTERVIEW**  
**ABC NEWS AUSTRALIA, AFTERNOON BRIEFING WITH GREG JENNETT**  
**MONDAY, 3 APRIL 2023**

***SUBJECTS: The interview covers the passing of Dr Yunupingu; the Voice to Parliament; and the Aston by-election***

**GREG JENNETT, HOST:** Okay, time now to bring in our political panel, none of whom is in Canberra today. We have Minister for Early Childhood Education and Youth. Anne Aly is in Perth and Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs. Barnaby Joyce is in Tamworth, on fine-looking country there. To Barnaby. I want to get dangle.

**BARNABY JOYCE:** Danglemah. I'm not in Tamworth.

**JENNETT:** Very nice, Danglemah, is that where you are? Not Tamworth? All right, close enough. Somewhere nearby. I want to get to The Voice, but it'd be fitting, I think, on the way through to get some reflections on Yunupingu. Anne Aly, I'll just open it to you first and then to Barnaby, who may, I suspect, have had more dealings or paths crossed. But your thoughts today Anne.

**ANNE ALY:** Thank you, Greg. And it's difficult to add any more to what has already been said in honour of this great man. I think, though, we all hope to leave a legacy when we come to this earth and he has left a really great legacy. Dr Yunupingu will be forever remembered for the path that he forged for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here in Australia. And I just want to add my condolences to his family, but to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders right across Australia as well.

**JENNETT:** Yeah, well said. And to Barnaby of Danglemah, did you have personal dealings with Yunupingu in your exalted office?

**JOYCE:** I don't think I did, to be honest. I've certainly met Yunupingu, but I don't think I met Yunupingu, as he's now known, who's passed away. And what I'm very aware of, obviously, is the Bark petition that was brought to Parliament and that was incredibly seminal in how Parliament works. And I understand completely his belief that Australians should rise as one and be a great nation in their own right. And my thoughts go out to Gulmach Clan and to all the people around the Gove Peninsula who would be feeling this intensely. And I think it's a great reflection on him that we all spare a moment to think how people in their lives do so much for their nation, but they don't have to be in Canberra to do it.

**JENNETT:** Yeah, exactly. And I don't want to move with unseemly haste into the matter that I suppose Yunupingu would have seen as unfinished business. But we do need to get there. That is the voice. And Barnaby, the Libs are going to meet in Canberra on Wednesday to grapple with some sort of unified position, perhaps. Doesn't the fact that they're still dealing with this underscore the point that the Nationals jumped the gun on this one?

**JOYCE:** Well, no more jumped the gun than the Labor Party and the Greens, who seem to have got to the position of 'yes' without getting all the details. We're still waiting for the Solicitor General's advice. This is the biggest change in my life, I would say for almost a century. We're talking about an unelected body that is defined on race, having access to the Executive of government. That's everything from interest rates, because we've got access to the Governor of the Reserve Bank and have a say in that to High Court judges, because they've got access to Cabinet and Cabinet selects them. I think it is so massive and it goes against the tenor of how a democracy works. With that much say in a position of power, you've got to be elected, not selected. And what I'd also say is that around here, it's a really difficult issue because you got people born next to each other, in the same hospital, go to the same primary school, go to the same high school, but somehow we going to define them on race, on DNA. And if you go to a place like Alice Springs do you honestly say to the people there, well, the reason we've got problems here is because the colour of your skin? Or do you say the circumstances you live in? And that's what must be addressed. Now, I don't see this as bringing the country together. I see this as dividing us up.

**JENNETT:** All right, we might discuss it a little further, but over to you, Anne, on the broader question about the Liberals, they look as though there might still be capacity for bipartisanship, if you listen to Julian Leeser today. But there'd have to be some compromise, evidently, on the wording of the proposal. Is that open?

**ALY:** Well, I would hope that the Liberals would come to this with open arms and open hearts. But the fact is, Greg, that the Prime Minister has had several meetings with Peter Dutton. He's had ample opportunities to be constructive on this and he simply hasn't. And quite frankly, the questions that they're asking and the kind of fear mongering that's going on is very disingenuous. The questions that they've been asking in Parliament are not questions that the Australian people are asking. These are questions that are devised by the tactics group in opposition in order to ask in question time to undermine the process.

**JENNETT:** But is it fair and just to interrupt your point, sorry...

**ALY:** I hold hope for the Liberal Party and for the Liberals that they are going to come to the table and hopefully learn the lessons from Aston and from other elections, that they need to be constructive and to work with the government on this, because this is an issue that precedes a Labor government. This is for the Australian people. And I think if the Liberals really want to demonstrate that they are heeding the lessons from the Aston by-election and other elections, they will move forward constructively.

**JENNETT:** Okay, we will get to Aston. Barnaby wanted to challenge a point.

**JOYCE:** Yeah, of course. The Australian people are not constitutional lawyers, and so the party has a responsibility, the parliament has a responsibility to deliver them the answers to the questions we ask. The Solicitor General has a written report now. The Solicitor General is the independent legal advice of Australia. The Labor Party are sitting on his advice. I think you've got a right to know it.

**JENNETT:** Barnaby, it's not common practice for governments to release these documents.

**JOYCE:** No, it's not. See, just recently, remember on the former Prime Minister Scott Morrison's, multiple ministries, not only they table advice, they lauded it, they screamed it through the rooftops. Well, do it again. Show Stephen Donahue's advice, because he's the person who can inform the Australian people about the concerns we have, which even we can see the Attorney-General of Australia had, because he came up with a tempering phrase to try and placate what would be seen as the excesses of power of an unelected body. Remember, once it goes into the

constitution, it's there. So, even like a sort of de facto ATSIIC which starts coming unstuck, we can't legislate it out, it's there forever.

**JENNETT:** Well, Anne, are you relaxed? I mean, it sounds like you are, relatively speaking, relaxed about an executive, or the Executive being broadly defined, so that it might include some of the entities that have been mentioned in debate, RBA being only one of them.

**ALY:** Well, once again, it's very clear that this is an independent advisory body and that the Parliament has the power to take on the advice and to discuss the advice and the constitution of that particular body. Now, Barnaby knows this and the Liberals know this, because Julian Leeser was a party to the original wording. In terms of the constitutional expertise that has gone into this, it is unsurpassed. There are so many constitutional experts that have worked on this. And as I said before, this is not something that the Labor Party has come up with, this predates Labor and it predates Liberal, and it is not a Labor or Liberal thing. This is for the Australian people. And quite frankly, as I said, this fear mongering about it is not just tiresome, it's very disingenuous. Questions are out there. The questions have been fear mongers are.

**JOYCE:** It's not fear mongering. It's trying to get honesty.

**ALY:** No, it's fear mongering, Barnaby.

**JOYCE:** Asking for honesty is not fear mongering. No, it's not fear mongering when both Marcia Langton and Mrs Morris say it's going to have complete holistic view on every aspect of Parliament, they said it, Anne. They said it, and that's a concern.

**Anne:** Barnaby, you're quite capable of putting forward a 'No' case without fear mongering.

**JENNETT:** Yeah. The Constitution alteration bill is a pretty simple proposition, where I imagine the Liberal Party, in fact, I know some members of the Liberal Party are coming at it from a sort of twofold position. One, could we just support the enabling of the referendum, a vote to be held later this year, because that's consistent with the mandate that Labour sought? And then we might go our own way and argue over the wording. Barnaby, what would be wrong with the first action there that I outlined? Simply recognising that a vote should be held and passing the bill that makes that happen.

**JOYCE:** Well, not preempting what either the National Party Room will say or the Liberal Party Room will say. I'll leave that up to their colleagues and my colleagues. What I could say and will say is, we need honesty. It's not fear mongering. We need honesty from the Labor Party on exactly how this works. We need honesty about what the legislation for The Voice will look like. I mean, you can't go to a referendum, say you're going to vote for The Voice and we'll tell you what The Voice is later on. It's like saying, I want you to give me permission to buy a car with whatever money is possible, and then later on you find I bought a Morris Minor for a million dollars. You've got to be honest, you've got to be straight. Constitutional changes are so incredibly important and the first thing you must be with the Australian people is straight, like they were in 1967, when we made a very right proposition for the proper counting of Aboriginal people in the census.

**JENNETT:** All right. And why don't we take you over to a sort of related theme? I think you tried to introduce Aston as a symptom of irrelevance. It might have been the phrase, certainly the one that some people have been using since Saturday. Your take, Anne Aly, on what Aston actually told us, not in relation to The Voice, but into the wider political landscape.

**ALY:** Well, I think it's up to the Liberal Party to do a post-mortem on Aston, and I think there are many views that have been proffered about why there was this immense loss in the Liberal Party. It certainly says something about their values and certainly says something about Peter Dutton's leadership. The fact is that the people of Aston outrightly rejected the Liberal Party and outrightly rejected Peter Dutton's leadership. So, it's up to them to do a post-mortem. But I've been hearing

a lot of talk about the Liberal Party needing to take heed, to look at itself and to change. Perhaps one of the ways they can do that is to recognise that their obstruction in Parliament and their unwillingness to work with the government on any issues is starting to really affect their brand and their vote.

**JENNETT:** Would you acknowledge that much, Barnaby? I mean, you're open to offer whatever analysis you like, but on current parliamentary tactics and strategy, the one that Anne just made – rejection; of... you name it, safeguard, and we can run down the list from there.

**JOYCE:** I'll acknowledge two things. One is they want us to never, ever challenge them in Parliament for them to have a carte blanche. This is where their so called negative comes from. They just want a carte blanche on legislation where they should be more honest about the details. They don't like Peter Dutton as leader because he's very effective and the vast majority of legislation that goes through the Parliament is bipartisan. It's just because it's not colourful, you don't see it. We spend every day just flicking things through that we know we don't have to haul through the coals of a greater intensity of view, but that's what we're doing with the Voice because, by gosh, it needs a greater intensity of view. And in Victoria, it's been a problem since Howard's time. We lost seats under Howard. With Tony Abbott, we had 40% of the vote there and only held 14 seats. With Malcolm Turnbull, the Liberals held 14 of the seats with only 37% of the vote. The Nats actually picked up one when back then it was great to prefer the Nats to pick up one. And then under Scott Morrison, we lost more seats and now we've lost another seat. That says a lot about what's happening in the structure of the Liberal Party and in Victoria. They've got to address that because we had a great candidate. But obviously the structure, the mechanisms of their party are not working well, whilst in Queensland they're highly successful.

**JENNETT:** Certainly making the Nationals look like a highly effective political force. Barnaby on some of those statistics that you just rattled off. Anne, that question, though, of lessons learned, are you holding your breath? Do you think that they're going to return back here in Budget Week in May with any altered strategy at play in this Parliament?

**ALY:** Look again, that's up to the Liberal Party. One can live in hope, but it's up to them to listen to the Australian people. It's not up to me to tell them what to do.

**JENNETT:** Well, life just got a little bit easier with an extra seat in your column anyway in the House, I suppose.

**ALY:** Well, Mary Doyle is a wonderful, wonderful was a wonderful candidate for Aston and will make an incredible contribution to Parliament and to government and I'm looking forward to welcoming her.

**JENNETT:** And that's a swearing in that will happen in Budget Week, as we understand it. Yes. Thank you, Barnaby. Barnaby Joyce in Danglemah, thank you so much for joining us from there. And Anne Aly in Perth. Really appreciate it. We'll talk to both of you again soon.

**[ENDS]**

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**THE HON DR ANNE ALY MP**  
**Minister for Early Childhood Education**  
**Minister for Youth**

**TRANSCRIPT**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT**

**INTERVIEW**

**ABC NEWS AUSTRALIA, AFTERNOON BRIEFING WITH GREG JENNETT**  
**THURSDAY, 2 MARCH 2023**

***SUBJECTS: Robodebt Royal Commission, Changes to super, Australia Post.***

**GREG JENNETT:** All right, time now to bring in our political panel. And joining us, Minister for Early Childhood Education and Youth Anne Aly, Anne's in Melbourne today. Welcome back Anne and Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs, Barnaby Joyce is with us from his hometown of Tamworth. Not too often we get a frontbench match up on Afternoon Briefing, so thank you, Barnaby and Anne both. Barnaby, I might take the first one to you don't know how much you've managed to catch of Stuart Robert's testimony at the Robodebt Royal Commission, but I was struck by a bit of a tension, I suppose, between ministerial accountability and Cabinet solidarity. What he's essentially said is that he knew there were deep problems with the scheme, but he had to zip his lips because of cabinet solidarity. I mean, that's akin to a Ministerial cover up, not transparency and accountability, isn't it, Barnaby?

**BARNABY JOYCE:** Yeah. Look, you're going to talk to any person in Cabinet, you're going to get the company lines, you're going to get the dot points. When you hear people say exactly the same words, they come straight out of the Prime Minister's office and they're regurgitated. There is, of course, within politics, a sense of this is the process that we must follow in our media tactics. And if any other party says they don't have media tactics, well they're lying to you, because, of course, they do. And the other part of Cabinet, of course, is you actually can't disclose what happens in Cabinet. This actually never happens. It's punishable by two years in jail to breach Cabinet's, breach of Cabinet confidence. And National Security Committee, I think, is punishable by up to 15 years in jail.

**JENNETT:** Sure. But when you become personally convinced that--

**JOYCE:** So it's more complicated than that.

**JENNETT:** That what you're administering is wrong, doesn't add up on the numbers. Barnaby, what is the course of action that should follow that realisation?

**JOYCE:** Well, I suppose, for my own part, not that I'm lauding myself, I have a bad habit of saying what's on my mind and it gets me into an awful lot of trouble at times, doesn't it? I suppose you could say what's on your mind. Maybe in hindsight, you do the other political tactic and just don't answer the question. That might be the better way to go.

**JENNETT:** Well, that's pretty time honoured. Yeah. I don't know how much we credit that either. But Anne, what are your thoughts on this? Don't know how much you caught of Stuart Robert's evidence today, but he seems conflicted internally, at least.

**MINISTER ANNE ALY:** I'm sorry I don't feel sorry for him. It just doesn't fly as far as I'm concerned. We thought we knew what we knew about Robodebt, and every day that this Royal Commission goes, we just learn more and more and more. And this is not just about what Stuart Robert said or didn't say, or cabinet confidence or zipping his lips or whatever your words you want to use. He was a Minister, he had responsibility, he could have changed it, and he didn't.

**JENNETT:** And what do you say? He should -- yeah, go on Barnaby.

**ALY:** Are you going to make an excuse Barnaby?

**JOYCE:** And I think Anne, he did. I think when he did find it, Anne I think he did change it, I think even his own evidence, when he found out about it, he went through the process of saying, we've got to immediately fix this. And I think that also came out. And he said that under oath. And I'll take what he says under oath as a fact.

**ALY:** I'm sorry, Barnaby, but that's cold comfort for the people who have been affected by Robodebt, for the families who have lost loved ones because of Robodebt. That's really cold comfort for them.

**JENNETT:** It's probably a little too early in your Ministerial career, Anne, to have encountered this, but part of Stuart Robert's experience, at least in his recounting of it, is some tension, at the very least, if not a complete breakdown, in relations with his most senior departmental officials. That was the Secretary of Human Services. Is it appropriate that legal advice, vital legal advice that went to the centre of Robodebt, by his account, was delayed for a matter of weeks in reaching him? So he says, anyway.

**ALY:** Well, I think one of the key things that you do as a Minister and one of the very early things that you do as a Minister, is to establish a good relationship with your department. One of the first things I did was I went and visited the department, I met with the secretaries of the department, I met with all the workers at the department. It's a vital part of what you do. You have to have a good relationship with your department and it's incumbent on Ministers to do that. It is absolutely part of your job description.

**JENNETT:** All right, Barnaby, why don't we move over to superannuation? There's a few other things to cover off, but superannuation has been the dominant issue of the week, saddling the Coalition up with a promise to repeal in the next Parliament if it was in a position to do so. Doesn't exactly help the budget predicament that the next government, of whatever stripe, would find itself in, does it? Barnaby, you entirely comfortable with this repeal promise?

**JOYCE:** We've just had a conversation about how you should keep your word, and the Labor Party were quite categorical. They weren't going to make changes to super. Well, they are. Now, there's one issue with the \$3 million balances, that's definitely a change. But the other one that concerns me is when they're going to broaden exactly how superannuation works, so they can deal with issues such as investment in climate change and, I suppose transmissions and wind towers and public housing. They believe in public housing, but they don't actually believe you can take money out to put into your own house. Now, I believe that one of the most secure things you can have in your own life is your own roof over your own head that you own, now they don't believe that. And so what we're seeing with the Labor Party is the manipulation of your money. It is your money, not theirs. It is your money. And trying to work out how they can use your \$3.3 trillion to fulfil their promises, which if you invested in, for instance, in the renewable sector, your fund would have underperformed, if you want it to perform really well, you should invest in coal

mines, because they're exporting coal and making a bucket load of money. But that is apparently something that they want you to move away from.

**JENNETT:** Why not a reasonable limit, though, Barnaby? I mean, the average worker in your electorate is going to look on askance at those who have parked \$100 million, \$400 million and higher, actually, in super. That's just not the original purpose is it?

**JOYCE:** I don't think there's many of them in my electorate. But if there are, and you have to go through the circumstance, the primary thing is we just had a conversation then about Robodebt, about people not telling the truth. The Labor Party went to the election, said they weren't going to change superannuation. They did. Right, they did. And they're going to do it. So they're breaking their promises. The next thing is there's nuances within this. I know it's prospective, I know it's coming and it's 2025 and they're going to an election. I concede that, but when someone like, for instance, sells a business and says, "where am I going to roll this money into", if they roll it into their super, they may end up with a balance over \$3 million. But do you think that that means they're an incredibly wealthy person? Well, they do it, they're comfortable and they're doing quite well. But I think that the problem with this is it's the first step. We always know they start with this sort of thin edge of the wedge and then as they need more money, they roll their way down to gobble up more of your money and use more of your money for their purposes.

**JENNETT:** All right, well, Anne I can see you're ready to go there. But look, on the question, if you want a question or a general response, you can go for it. But my question, if I had one, would be on indexation. I mean, it is only meant to capture people, you know, of reasonable means, I would suggest, at the moment. But by not indexing it, younger workers in two decades time may well find themselves hit by this higher tax, won't they?

**ALY:** Well, can I just, first of all, respond to Barnaby? Because I think there was like a million things in there and I'm not quite sure where to start. But first of all, let me just say that this is a very modest change and one that has been welcomed, for example, by the chair of Australian Super, who has said that this is a good thing that will fix a problem. It's a very modest change that affects 0.5 per cent of Australians, that's 0.5 per cent of Australians with more than \$3 million in their super. But that's the first thing. The second thing is we're not doing it now. We're going to take it to the next election. So Australians will have a say on this. They'll be able to say and by then, they'll be able to decide about the indexation, and they'll be able to have all of the information that's in front of them. This is actually transparency. This is actually us saying, this is what we're going to do. Here is the proposition. It's on the table. Australians can vote on it on the next election. And as for all the other things that Barnaby said about, I don't know, we're going to come after your chicken and your dogs and your I don't know what else, well, that's all just rubbish. It's a very small and modest change and something that needs to be fixed.

**JOYCE:** I never said that.

**JENNETT:** Alright, and on the indexation question? Yeah, go on Barnaby, I'll park my question Barnaby.

**JOYCE:** I never said that. I said, and it's from the Treasurer himself about broadening the concept of super to deal with other issues such as climate change, such as public housing.

**ALY:** Alright, can I just respond to that?

**JOYCE:** And they did say that's using your money, that's using my money, your viewers money, for other political purposes, and they don't want it.

**ALY:** Can I just respond to that please?

**JOYCE:** They want your super to make as much money as it possibly can for them, not to fulfil your job.

**JENNETT:** I understand the argument you're introducing there Barnaby, and Anne I think you want to respond to that.

**ALY:** Can I just say, okay, so let's look at the objective of super. And what Jim Chalmers has said, the Treasurer has said, is that we want to legislate an objective for super. Super should be about saving money so that you have a decent retirement, so that you have a dignified retirement. And it should be a system that's equitable and fair. Now, it shouldn't be used for early access for things like cosmetic surgery. And we saw \$36 billion ripped out of super over the last few years for things like cosmetic surgery and upgrades to the four-wheel drive and so on and so forth. I'm not saying there are not legitimate reasons for people to be able to access their super early, and there are. But we really need to have some tightening around what is super for to really have an objective for super. And what that will do, it will guide superannuation funds into investing towards that objective for the purpose of that objective. But it also means that everyone has real clarity that super is saving so that you have a decent and dignified retirement.

**JENNETT:** And I think all the funds have said if they are to follow this lead, they would only invest in things that met their returns. But anyway, I want to move on just to one final topic, and I guess you are really across this one and probably feel it a bit more keenly. Barnaby, Australia Post, when was the last time you, outside of a work context, posted a letter? And why not update the rules for that particular enterprise?

**JOYCE:** Because we use letters all the time and if we don't get Internet, we still rely on the capacity for a bill to turn up in the mail. Now, talking about honesty, I want to go through this little document. This is a Labor document, it's their ALP national platform from 2021. And I'll read you what they said. This is another sort of oh, here we go. This is what you said "Labor will maintain Australia Post in full public ownership and ensure it provides universal and equitable services to all Australians. We understand the essential role of Australia Post and post offices for local communities, small business and e-commerce. We will maintain and enhance the range of postal and other services offered by Australia Post", you're cutting them, mate.

**ALY:** Maintain and enhance, nothing's been cut. It's going through a consultation process Barnaby, settle down.

**JOYCE:** We can't trust you guys.

**JENNETT:** All right, Anne take it away. I think I can see what the counter argument is here. None of what they've actually announced today, necessarily cuts across those objectives, but anyway.

**ALY:** It's a consultation. The fact is that Australia Post operates on a business model, and it's a business model that's just not working at the moment. So this is a consultation to look at how to hello, maintain and enhance Australia Post, just like it says in that document. Barnaby. Thanks.

**JENNETTT:** Okay, well, yeah, go on, Barnaby.

**JOYCE:** Well hang on, so you're not going to cut it? You're not going to cut any post offices, not going to get rid of any of our post offices. You're going to allow them to continue on, you're going to allow the mail to be continued? Are you going to make that promise?

**ALY:** I don't know where you got cutting post offices from mate.

**JENNETT:** Wouldn't you have licenced agents in your electorate? Who aren't making money?

**JOYCE:** You're not going to do it. I think this is great. Who is great? You're not going to do it. You're not going to cut any Anne?

**JENNETT:** My question, Barnaby, will get Anne to answer yours. But my question is, wouldn't you have licenced agents and operators of post offices in your electorate, small shops, that want to get out because they just can't make enough money?

**JOYCE:** Well, the issue is, the government has to understand that if you say it's a business plan and that's only to make money and that's its only purpose, well, that's not the attitude you have when you subsidise electric vehicles. Wait, so they're going to subsidise electric vehicles, but you're going to get rid of the small-town post offices because you think they're unviable? I don't understand this. I tell you which is more important to people at Augathella and people at Emmaville is not that they have a charging station, they have a post office. That's kind of important to them.

**JENNETT:** All right, last word. Anne just on the possible closures.

**ALY:** Well news flash, people that own post offices and operate post offices need to make money. Right. And the fact is, as I said before, the business model is not working. It is timely to conduct some consultations and to revise the business model for Australia Post. Last time I was at the Post Office, it wasn't to send a letter, it was to get some things signed off and the people in the line, some were there to pay bills, some were there to post letters. And some were there to do other forms of business. So the Post Office isn't just about sending letters Barnaby.

**JENNETT:** All right, let's see what the consultation process throws up.

**JOYCE:** I know that, and if it's not there we haven't got anything HAVE WE.

**JENNETT:** You'll have an ability, we all will, to provide feedback to that consultation process. We're going to wrap it up. Barnaby Joyce, Anne Aly, great to have both of you. Couple of front benchers, makes a nice change. Thanks for joining us.

**[ENDS]**

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