Q&A Transcript – Working Paper

This is my rough working paper, provided for anyone who wants to check my figures.

Generally, I have counted 'interruptions' where a panellist is interrupted mid-sentence as indicated by elipses (…) in the transcript. There are some additional incidents where, I believe, it is clear that an interruption has occurred – despite the absence of elipses. For example, where Jones specifically asks one panellist to speak and another butts in before they have a chance to respond. When someone has cut in on a conversation and either Jones or the original speaker cuts in, I have not counted that as an interruption (as indicated in parenthetic comments added to the text). Where one speaker obviously butts in to a conversation, but this occurs after the previous speaker has ended a sentence, I have marked this as an 'interjection' but, to be fair, I have not included these in the counts or the blog post. On the whole, I believe that the number of 'interruptions' I have attributed to Pyne et al is a conservative estimate.

Q&A is based on discussions and, of course, interruptions are a normal part of discussions. I do not intend to perjorative in listing interruptions. Of course, not all of them are rude or unwelcome. However, when one panellist makes an extraordinarily high number of interruptions or another panellist is the recipient of an extraordinarily high number of interruptions it does seem to indicate something more than the cut and thrust of ordinary discussion.

Word Count

- Jones: 1881 words (approx.)
- Pyne: 2400 words
- Tanner: 2142 words
- Akerman: 1059 words
- Sun: 1205 words
- Ellis: 1962 words

Interruptions

Pyne: 34 Interruptions

- 21 against Ellis
- 4 against Akerman
- 6 against Jones
- 1 against an audience member
- 1 against Sun
- 1 against Tanner

Tanner: 11 interruptions

- 5 against Ellis
- 3 against Pyne
- 3 against Jones

Akerman: 11 interruptions

- 6 against Ellis
- 1 against Pyne
- 1 against Tanner
- 3 against Jones
Sun: 4 interruptions
- 2 against Pyne
- 2 against Jones

Ellis: 8 interruptions
- 2 against Pyne
- 1 against Tanner
- 4 against Jones
- 1 against Sun

Jones: 19 interruptions
- 1 against Tanner
- 10 against Pyne
- 4 against Ellis
- 3 against Sun
- 1 against Akerman

Interruptions
Ellis – 21 x Pyne, 4 x Jones, 6 x Akerman, 5 x Tanner = 36 total
Pyne – 3 x Tanner, 1 x Akerman, 2 x Sun, 2 x Ellis, 10 x Jones = 18

*See annotated transcript and Interruption Table below.

Word Count Transcript
The text below will make no sense as I have cut and pasted each speaker's comments into blocks under their names for the purpose of taking a word count of their entire contribution.

Jones
Good evening and welcome to Q&A. I'm Tony Jones and answering your questions tonight: former Rudd Cabinet insider and Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner; Liberal Party strategist and Spokesman on Education Christopher Pyne; actor Nilaja Sun, whose play No Child is based on her time teaching in New York's toughest schools; the Minister for Employment, Participate and Early Childhood Education Kate Ellis; and News Limited political economist Piers Akerman. Please welcome our panel.

Thank you. Q&A is live from 9.35 Eastern Daylight Saving Time. It is simulcast on News 24 and News Radio. Go to our website to send a question or join the Twitter conversation using the hashtag on your screen. We'll start tonight with a question from Matt Jones.

Piers Akerman?
What, the public having a say?

Kate Ellis?
That’s been repeated today in some respects. Julia Gillard did an online Facebook interview and trolls got on board and more insults along the same lines.

Okay. All right. I’m going to hear from the rest of the panel. Christopher Pyne, you jumped in there.
Are you suggesting that the staff had some role in this?

Christopher Pyne, let's go to the question that was asked here. It was about Alan Jones and whether there is a lynch mob mentality at play here? Do you think there is?

It was a...

It was a Young Liberal Party function, let's remember that.

Quite a few of them did not repeat the remarks immediately afterwards until a reporter with a secret recording came forward.

I'm nowhere near as sensitive.

All right. Okay. We will - there are questions...

There are questions relating to that issue.

Let's go to Lindsay...

Sorry, go ahead.

So what do you think about a social media campaign aimed at (a) getting him off air and (b) stopping his advertisers.

Not in the States.

Lindsay Tanner, let's hear from you.

There's a lady down the front with her hand up and we'll just try and get a microphone to you in a minute. In the meantime, let's go to Robert Magyar.

We'll have to get you to repeat the beginning of the question. We just missed that.

Lindsay Tanner, I'll pick you back up then on that question.

Can I just interrupt there? Because the questioner asked about the vilification of Muslims.

And, of course, in 2005, before the Cronulla riots, Alan Jones was responsible for making a whole series of outrageous and some argue, racist or incitement to racial hatred style remarks in the lead up to those riots. Did that cross the boundary?

Piers Akerman, I'll bring you back in there. Are there any limits to free speech in your opinion?

Let me just cut in. I mean are there limits along these lines: the questioner asked about the vilification of Lebanese Muslims. Before the Cronulla riots, Jones described Lebanese Muslims as vermin, as mongrels who simply rape, pillage and plunder the nation that has taken them in. Is that acceptable free speech?

Well, can I tell you, the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal followed it very closely and said that he had committed an incitement to hatred, serious contempt and severe ridicule of Lebanese Muslims. He appealed that and now his appeal has been lost and he's been asked to apologise. That apology has not been forthcoming.

Okay.
Seven years we’re talking. Kate Ellis, Alan Jones did make those comments. Are they acceptable as free speech and if they are not, why did so many politicians on both sides, including the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition continue to go on his program? Why did his advertisers stay with him after those comments?

But can I bring you to the question...

Why would political leaders, supposedly setting an example, continue to go on his radio program after he made those comments?

Christopher Pyne?

Well, would you like me to read out a few more?

“I’ll tell you what kind of grubs these were. These lot were Middle Eastern grubs. My suggestion is to invite biker gangs to be present at Cronulla railway station when the Lebanese thugs arrive. Australians old and new should not have to put up with this sort of scum.”

Okay. Lindsay Tanner, do you want a final comment on this?

Well, it is time to move along. You’re watching Q&A. Our next question comes from Georgina Freeman.

I’ll just go back to our questioner because you have suggested it is a paid political...

Lindsay Tanner, is Labor playing up to this notion in order to make political capital?

Piers Akerman?

Kate Ellis?

Can we allow the comments to continue?

Before we go on, we have people with their hands up.

Just hang on, Christopher. I’m just going to take a question from the audience. Go ahead.

[Audience member directs question to Pyne]

Christopher Pyne, the (indistinct)...

Can I just bring in Nilaja here.

It is not unknown in the United States for politicians to bring their wives out into the public to sort of humanise them.

It’s happened, obviously, the presidential campaign on both sides. Tony Abbott did it recently or Tony Abbott’s wife came out recently to, in a way, tell us more about him.

Margie.

Okay, I’m going to another question from the audience.

Christopher, there is room, however, for someone to ask a question from the audience. Let’s go to Clare Angel-Auld.

[Audience member directs question to Pyne]
Did he identify himself to you as a feminist at that time?

Kate Ellis?

Okay, we've got another question from the audience. I'll just go to that gentleman with his hand up there. Go ahead.

I won't have people booing other audience members if you don't mind. We've got a question down the front as well.

(Audience member directs question to Ellis, which Jones will not let her answer)

We'll take that as a comment. We'll come to this one.

Well, Christopher Pyne can answer that.

Okay. Let's move along. We'll go to other subjects. You're watching Q&A. The next question comes from Jessie Huynh.

(Audience member directs question to Sun)

Nilaja, very few people, unless they've actually done it, know what's like to stand in front of a classroom of rowdy teenagers.

You end up in tears.

Your play is called No Child.

You actually mention, "No child left behind." That was an act of the congress.

Exactly. What is the point of the title of the play?

There may well be a few teachers here. So while we're talking education, let's move onto our next question. It's on this subject. It's from Hassan Raza.

Okay, I'm going to start with Nilaja here because this testing system really did start in the United States.

Well, we've got a government minister here. So let's ask Kate Ellis?

Okay. We're not going to talk about the Building the Education Revolution now. We're talking about...

But can we...

The question was about testing and the testing regime and I would like you to address that first, Christopher Pyne. Are you going to keep the NAPLAN testing regime if you're in Government?

Can I just interrupt you? I'll let you respond to this. There's a tweet that's just come in from Asme Fahmi: American system also leads to systematic cheating by the teachers themselves. Is that true? And [Niljah] I suppose it's probably best to ask you about that.

Kate Ellis, we have heard a few examples of this going on in Australia as well.

Because the funding is reliant entirely - well, not entirely but the extra funding is relied on the testing system in the States. Is it the same here or not?
Okay. I'm going to go to another question on education. This one is from Melissa Deprez. Lindsay Tanner do you want to answer that? I mean you can take it more broadly if you like. Can we pull out one of - Lindsay Tanner, can we pull out one of those issues in equity because that's what the Four Corners program revealed, was a shocking level of inequity in some of our poorest suburbs, in the sort of education opportunities for children. The Gonski Review is attempting to deal with this issue. It requires $6 billion a year of extra funding. If you were Finance Minister now, would you find that money?

So let me briefly as you this, because, well, Gonski says you to have find extra money. And vast amounts of extra money, $6 billion plus per year. Do you think the current obsession with getting a surplus at all costs is going to jeopardise that?

I've got a few hands up down in the front here.

I want to come to Kate Ellis first. You've heard the question. The Four Corners program was referred to, the Gonski report requires vast sums of money. There was one policy alternative suggested there. Do you want to respond to that first?

Okay.

All right. We've got a whole range of people with...

Sorry, can you just repeat the promise?

Just repeat the promise.

Just repeat the promise.

What about we hear some questions from the audience. We've got a young lady there with her hand up. Go ahead.

(Audience member directs question to Kate Ellis)

The questioner just asked about a remarkable number of people leaving this area because their pay is not high enough to actually sustain doing the work.

Do you agree with that, that they're not surviving on the wage they're being given?

That's why so many are leaving.

Okay.

Okay. We're almost out of time. We've got time for one last question. It comes from Stewart Lung. Lindsay Tanner?

Can I just interrupt though? You blame cynical manipulators who are obsessed with polling data, essentially, for this whole parlous state of affairs.

That is...

That's is pretty much one of the key things (indistinct)...

So is that something you complained about, just to go back to the questioner’s question - is that something you complained about when you were in cabinet?

Okay. All right. We're running out of time. I will quickly hear from the panel on this. Christopher Pyne?
Christopher, let's personalise it. What is going to be in your book after you leave? Do you want to tell us now?

Okay, yes.

But I'm going to just interrupt you there because that's not what the questioner asked and I will bring you back to the question.

Well, we're talking - I'm sorry to tell you we're talking about responding to questions that are coming from the audience and we have done so until now.

Okay. Let's see if Kate Ellis...

Let's see if Kate Ellis wants to talk about the questions from the audience.

Let's go for a final comment from our observer.

I thought it was going to be, "Don't sleep with the maid." That's all we have time for. Please thank our panel: Lindsay Tanner, Christopher Pyne, Nilaja Sun, Kate Ellis and Piers Akerman. Okay. Next week on Q&A: comedian author and psychotherapist Pamela Stephenson; the Minister for Workplace Relations Bill Shorten; the project presenter and Gen X team leader Charlie Pickering; the Shadow Minister for Industry Sophie Mirabella; and the editor of the IPA Review James Paterson. Until next week's Q&A, goodnight.

Pyne

Her staff. Her staff are moderating it, Piers.

Her staff are moderating it.

Well, just on the blog... Well, I don't know, Tony, but I do think it is peculiar that since her staff are moderating the Facebook discussion, they allowed trolls to breakthrough …

Yeah, we do but...

Well, why didn't her staff moderate those remarks off instantaneously. Why did they live them on there and them make a big political story out of it?

I just think it's passing strange that if her staff were moderating this apparent first in national politics, that they allowed these very unpleasant statements to be put up on the Facebook rather than, as soon as they appeared, removing them instantaneously, which didn't happen. So I think that's peculiar.

Well, I think Alan Jones' comments were crass and unacceptable.

And I'm glad that, one, he apologised and, two, everybody has basically condemned Alan Jones, from the local store keeper to the Leader of the Opposition, and so they should have. And he's accepted that and he's apologised. I do think, though, that Labor has rather unpleasantly tried to use this issue to continue to distract people from the issues that main street Australia are concerned about. Now, apparently these remarks are so egregious and ghastly they must never be repeated and yet Kate Ellis has repeated them tonight and, in fact, Labor ministers have been repeating them for a week. Ever since Alan Jones, the story, broke, Labor ministers can't get to a microphone fast enough to repeat these remarks.

Now, if we're all so deeply offended by them...
But if we're all so...

The Labor ministers have been repeating them for a week, ad nauseam, in front of every microphone. So as a person who’s been around politics for a while, it suggests to me that what they’ve actually been doing is trying to make political capital out of this issue and I think that is disgraceful and I think that Alan Jones' comments are utterly, you know, exceptional and grotesque and I also think that the comments that Labor ministers have been making about Tony Jones as a - Tony Abbott.

It’s deliberately confusing but I think the...

Remarks about Tony Abbott about supposedly being a misogynist are deeply offensive. Basically the Labor Party is saying he hates his wife, his three daughters and his two sisters...

And, yet, there's no public reaction to that at all.

It won’t happen here.

Well, we can be appalled by Alan Jones' comments but I also think that the attacks on small business people who advertise with Alan Jones - it’s ironic that people who are saying Alan Jones' remarks are unacceptable are using the most egregious descriptions to describe the small business people who advertise with Alan Jones.

Are people missing the irony of that extraordinary campaign?

Hear, hear.

Hear, hear.

Hear, hear.

Because it’s a free country.

Because it’s a free country.

The point is it’s a free country, Tony. Now, I don’t have any regard for the remarks that you have read out that Alan Jones made about Lebanese Muslims. I am not sure if it was specific to a group of people or whether it was more broader remarks. It wasn’t...

Well, you’ve read out a bit already but you obviously want to get them out there.

Well, obviously if the appropriate body has found against him he should apologise. But they didn't find against him seven years ago. He appealed that and more recently he’s failed to apologise but perhaps he’ll get around to doing that very soon. I hope he does if that is the correct admonition for him. I’m surprised...

But, look, the point about freedom of speech, to go back to the question...

The point about freedom of speech is the man shouldn't be made to be sorry.

The man should be made to face the tribunal's admonition. But I am reminded of my constituent who rang me many years ago, who was complaining about movies on the SBS and she was an elderly lady and she said they were disgusting and grotesque and as a consequence she had to ask her neighbour to come in and watch them with her because she couldn't believe how dreadful they were and I said to her, "Madam, if you don't like the movies on SBS, change the channel." At the end of the day, if people don't like Alan Jones, don't listen to him. Turn him off. And that is, in a free democracy like ours, that is the final answer on anybody who we don't like what they say, don't listen to them.
Don’t read what they write.

Well, I reject what is more of a paid advertisement for the or unpaid advertisement for the Labor Party than it is actually a genuine question.

Can I just say that some of the things you’ve said are complete assertions that have been utterly denied by Tony Abbott and you stated them as facts. That’s the first thing. Secondly, the Tony Abbott I know is a person who has absolute regard for strong women and surrounds himself with them. His wife, Margie, his chief of staff Peta Credlin. He loves and respects his three daughters and his two sisters. To suggest that Tony Abbott is a misogynist is part of a smear campaign designed to stop him becoming Prime Minister and let me say this: it is a distraction from the issues like cost of living pressures, job insecurity, the economy, and Labor wants us to have that distraction. They want the Australian public to talk about everything other than the economy, job insecurity, cost of living and the carbon tax and unfortunately that question falls for that Labor Party campaign. To Margie Abbott came out on Friday, because she was thoroughly sick of people telling bald faced lies about her husband. Tanya Plibersek, Nicola Roxon, unfortunately Kate Ellis, others have been responsible for this, what’s been dubbed the handbag hit squad. It is an outrage what people have said about Tony Abbott and it is as offensive to suggest he hates his wife, his three daughters and his two sisters... ...as the things Alan Jones said about Julia Gillard's father.

I corrected myself and said unpaid political advertisement for the Labor Party.

The Labour women didn’t but nothing is said about that.

Because at the moment they’re leading the handbag hit squad.

Jill Meagher. Jill Meagher.

It’s a disgraceful campaign, Kate.

It’s an orchestrated campaign.

I love Downton Abbey.

I like the Dowager Duchess too. I think she’s hysterical.

He never said that. You’re just making things up.

Rubbish.

He didn't say women were housewives who did the ironing.

That is a complete false statement.

What about when he was Health Minister?

He did an excellent job as Health Minister for women and (indistinct)... Yeah, in 1977.

She moved motion. Well, I think people say all sorts of things when they’re at university which they come to regret later in life and the idea that somebody should...

That somebody should be held to something they said in 1977 when they were an 18 year old student, I think, is ridiculous, quite frankly.
What's going on.

This is a family show.

His chief of staff is a woman as well, Peta Credlin.

His deputy is a woman.

His deputy is a woman as well.

He’s surrounded by women. God knows how there’s any room for any of us who aren’t women.

Sure.

I think the thing that qualified him for that title, well, number one, he has the most generous maternity leave scheme on the table in politics in Australia today. Now, that didn’t go down so well with the audience. It was much more popular on the panel but...

The truth is Labor has a maternity scheme. Tony Abbott’s is much more generous. Now, a person who doesn't believe that women should be in the workforce, if that’s what the suggestion has been made, would not surely then have the most generous maternity leave scheme that supports women being in the workforce and returning to the workforce at the level at which they left it and then hopefully come back to it. So I think that’s item number one. Number two, I was his parliamentary secretary for three years in the Howard Government. He made significant changes...

Well, this isn’t the committee of public safety.

The truth is as Health Minister he made changes in obstetrics and gynaecology, for example, which were heralded by the Royal College of Obstetrics and gynaecology as the most significant change that any government had made to help women. This government has dismantled those. So let’s talk about the things that have actually happen rather than the things that are talked about in politics generally. So there are two examples.

You can go back to the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology if you want to and you can talk about other issues if you wish to but you asked me for some examples. They’re some examples which prove that Tony Abbott puts his money where his mouth is. He doesn’t just talk the talk in order to get the audience on side but actually walks the walk.

No, he restricted it...

Actually the Department of Health’s advice, Kate, because I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Health at the time with responsibility for the Therapeutic Goods Administration, was that RU 486 was and is a dangerous drug and the recommendation is it should not be approved for use in Australia.

Tony Abbott hasn’t said he’s going to abolish abortion.

I mean we’re getting a little bit ahead of ourselves here. Tony Abbott has made it so clear that even David Marr had to write about it in his essay that Tony Abbott has said he has no intention of going anywhere near the abortion laws in Australia which, by the way, are State based laws anyway and he’s running for Prime Minister of Australia, not Premier of a State.

Oh, good.

We introduced the NAPLAN test.

I’ll answer that question. So is Lindsay.
I’d love to talk about waste.

I think it’s a very good question. The problem with the NAPLAN testing is not the idea of testing students for the purposes of a diagnostic tool for teachers or principals to use to decide, you know, where children are going well, where they’re going poorly, where to put an emphasis. The problem with the NAPLAN testing is the publication of the results on the net and the creation of leaked tables and the pressure that the publication places on teachers, principals, school systems and so on. My view is that when the NAPLAN wasn’t being published, and I have four children, three of whom are at school and last year they did the NAPLAN tests because they were in year 3 and year 5, two of my students my children didn’t even know the NAPLAN was coming ‘til the day it was done. The other one said that he’d known all about the NAPLAN for months because Mr Whatever-His-Name had been teaching to the test. So that was very interesting as hopefully a future Minister for Education, should we be fortunate to be elected. The publication of the NAPLAN puts the pressure on the teachers to teach to the test. Before it was just a diagnostic tool.

Which is what David Murray said on The 7.30 Report was happening in Australia right now.

Well, what reform? What money?

Well, they’re all motherhood statements. How much money are you going to put into education in the next four years of the quadrennium funding?

That’s all - I could say all the things you just said too.

But people want to know what you’re actually going to do. I mean you’ve got this announcement about the Gonski reforms, which is all feathers and no meat. It’s a perfectly reasonable question. My answer to that question would be it’s very easy to talk about how more money fixes every problem. One of the major issues in education is not whether there’s enough money but whether we have the quality teachers that we need and how to support quality teaching. How to give them the training and professional development they need. Principal autonomy. A robust curriculum. Ending the discrimination against disabled children in the school system. I mean there’s a whole range of issues.

And motherhood statements just doesn’t cut it.

The Coalition is committed...

...to $6.5 billion dollars of new spending over the next quadrennium, which is the current quantum of funds plus 6% indexation. That’s a commitment on the table.

That’s a commitment on the table.

Well, you said I didn’t make any promises. I just told you exactly what our commitment is.

You can’t have your cake and eat it too.

It’s lovely to have your cake and eat it too.

We have said that we will fund schools in the next quadrennium at the current quantum of funding plus 6% indexation over the - which is the average over the forward estimates, which equates to six and a half...

Which equates to six...

But the government isn’t committed to it, Lindsay.

The government hasn’t committed to it.
You are not.

What about some real money on the table.

You were asked about the government's policy.

You were asked about the government's policy.

Wasn't it.

We're running out of time.

I thought you promised them $1.4 billion.

Well, it was in the newspaper.

That's right. (Indistinct)

That one's for you.

That's true.

No, he has. I've read articles he used to write years ago about that.

It's a good summary though

Well, since we're so short of time, can I just support Lindsay and the claim that he's made that he's been saying this for years. Because when I was a very young Young Liberal collecting clippings of newspaper articles, I collected one of his clippings where he was saying just this very same thing in about 1986. So he's not a Johnny-come-lately.

It was. It was. I can tell you.

Oh, goodness gracious. I'm never leaving.

Speaker.

Why haven't we talked about the speaker.

What about the emissions trading scheme that was axed and brought back?

What about reopening Nauru?

Citizens assembly.

The list is endless.

Tanner

It's all very confusing.

We haven't said anything about you, Tony.

Tony, I find it hard to get distressed about Alan Jones getting a dose of his own medicine and to me there is something of a culmination of a long pattern here and it's been long overdue but when it is
due to end, I think that’s a legitimate question. We have got bigger issues to worry about in this
country.

And I know the people I work with, I don't think they're worried too much about this issue now. My
mates at the Tilden Fire Brigade where I volunteer, I don't think they're too concerned about it
anymore. One of the things that does distress me about it is the ability for people just to keep feeding
off it and feeding off it and feeding off it. I’m no fan of Alan Jones. I think he's outrageous. I think what
he did was outrageous but surely, for God's sake, we've got more serious things in this country that
we should be talking about.

Look, I think it’s very important that we do defend freedom of speech in this country and the critical
thing to remember is that essentially it’s freedom for people to say things we don’t like and one of
the...

Yes.

Look, I suspect it might have but without having the full transcript of the various comments he made in
front of me and being able to connect that in time with actual events, it’s a bit difficult to draw a full
conclusion but certainly those were appalling comments and, I think, raise the question of whether
there was some kind of direct incitement to breaking the law, to violence. I think that’s a legitimate
question to ask there but I wouldn’t want to actually say definitively, yes, that happened without
examining it much more closely. I’ve got a memory of the events but it's quite some time ago. But on
freedom of speech, the critical thing we have always got to remember is that is about freedom for
people to say and write things and publish things that we don't like, not things that we do like but
things we don't like and I’m very concerned that we’ve got a report that's been delivered to the
Government which, thankfully, it appears to not going to be proceeded with that we’re going to have
more regulation of content in our media on the basis that in some way it might be inappropriate or
wrong or that it’s hurtful to some people. Much as I dislike some of our media, much as I am ultra-
critical of it, I still think it’s important that we defend freedom of speech as a general cornerstone of
our society.

Could you imagine what would have happen to him if he’d substituted the Lebanese Muslims for Jews
and he was describing Jews as vermin? Can you imagine?

Just to hope that we can have an Alan Jones free zone for the rest of the show.

Look, to be honest I haven't followed the ins and outs of this closely, Tony. I have picked up in the
ether the general positions here but. I think Christopher is somewhat exaggerating the nature of
Labor's critique of Tony Abbott for effect but there is a wider question that I think everybody is entitled
to ask which is - and whether it’s about any leading politician is: does this political leader understand
me? Do they understand my aspirations, my life, the experiences I have, my fears, my concerns and
can I entrust them with leading the nation knowing that they will have my kind of person at heart? So it
is legitimate for people to ask the question does a political leader, particularly a male political leader,
understand women? I suspect that from time to time things get a bit robust in both directions. There is
certainly plenty of examples I can remember when I was in parliament when Tony Abbott, I think,
pretty much crossed the line in terms of his critique of individuals. He was particularly nasty to Cheryl
Kernot. I remember that very, very well. So in some respects if you dish it out, you’ve got to take it.
Now, I haven't followed the detail of what’s has been said in recent times closely enough to really
have a view about it, to be honest. But if you’re up there putting yourself up as the would-be leader of
the nation, you’re going to cop that stuff. Kevin Rudd had a lot of nasty stuff flow around about him at
the time. John Howard had plenty of terrible things said about him. Kim Beazley did. So whether this
is hugely different from that, I am not quite sure.

I think she did apologise in parliament, didn’t she?
Well, it was in the main committee. I don't think any of them were there and why should they be seen as having responsibility for that just because they're female?

Jill Meagher.

Don't you like Downton Abbey either?

It's a very good show.

Maggie Smith is sensational. Sensational.

I won't tell them what you said if you don't tell them what I said. How about that.

That's right.

He's actually met some women.

Yes, but he swore him to secrecy though.

I was just about to fire up, Tony.

Yeah, that's the key point.

Well, I think the first thing is that it's wrong to look at two distinct things and tie them together. You should the proposition you're advancing should be dealt with on its merits and not connected to some other thing and made an either or. So the question of how the baby bonus might alternatively be used, I think, is not a good way of looking at it. It's better off just to say, well, is there some merit in using, in effect, reward structures for the parents of kids who are finishing school? To me there is one really obvious reason why that's not a good idea and that is that 90% of what you are doing would be rewarding people for doing what would have happened anyway without the reward. That's a really inefficient use of public money. This whole area of policy is incredibly complex and fraught and you've got everything from performance pay for teachers, the NAPLAN testing, funding issues about equity. All these things are very, very complex and you have to be careful not to go for what are ultimately relatively simplistic kinds of options and I think this is too simplistic.

I wish I had the power to find that kind of money. I would have made a lot of my colleagues very happy. But unfortunately it's not quite that simple but I think there is a wider point which, my understanding of the Gonski Report, is very much at the core of the report. There's been a fallacy in debate about education in this country for decades, which is that there is a finite pile of money that has got schools written on it and it doesn't matter what you do, that amount of money is not going to change and the real question is how much of it goes to this kind of schools as opposed to that kind of schools when, in truth, the real issue for this country is that we need to dedicate more resources, more effort to education generally and to put behind us those long standing battles about the distribution of the cake and, to me, that's the good thing about the Gonski report is it seems to do that. The real challenge for us - we're are a very wealthy society. We spend a lot of money as a society on rubbish. Schools matter. Education matters. We need to lift our game and the questions of carving up the cake, they're relevant. They're important but they're secondary questions. Yes, the focus has got to be primarily on people who are at the greatest disadvantage and need the greatest assistance, but it is not a case where we have to take from other schools to solve those problems.

Yes.

It'll make it difficult. There is no question about that. But the reason why it's important to have that commitment and the reason why it was important that Kevin Rudd, Wayne Swan, Julia Gillard and I made that commitment when we were launching the stimulus package in January 2009 was that
without that kind of discipline, you end up like Europe. You end up like the United States. So it is fundamental, however painful it can be, however much it forces you into difficult choices, if you always put off until tomorrow being disciplined, being restrained, then you end up with excessive debt and you end up in a very fragile position and ultimately you end up with the kind of problems that you’ve seen in the developed world all around the planet so...

Well, I don’t agree with David on that point. There are always going to be choices. The question of the $6 billion per annum, how you get there, over what period of time, what alternative uses of money are available, that’s much more complex than just saying “Well, okay, it’s surplus or more money for schools.”

It’s much more complex.

That’s the status quo.

That’s basically status quo.

That’s basically...

I hope not.

This sounds like it’s for me.

Well, okay. First, the premise of your question is totally untrue. I have been engaged in these debates for many years.

As even Christopher has just backed me up on.

Thank you Christopher. Secondly, there is a wider global phenomenon going on here that the Labor Party needs to front up to. We are seeing traditionally strong social democratic and Labor parties that have been used to getting routinely 40% plus of the votes suddenly getting 23%, 25%. We’ve seen disasters for Labor in Queensland and New South Wales, polling often into the twenties federally. All of these things are part of a wider global phenomenon and a big change in how Labor goes about its business that’s nothing to do with the current government or Kevin Rudd or Julia Gillard but is a long-term structural shift that really worries me. When I first joined Labor in the ‘70s it was too much dominated by belief. To some degree almost elements of zealotry and passion and the views of the electorate were kind of like an inconvenient sort of nuisance that you had to look at occasionally. Bob Hawke’s great achievement was to get the Labor Party to look at issues on their merits and gradually the emphasis shifted. But what’s happened subsequently and this is not about this government of Federal politics but just about the whole situation, the emphasis has moved more and more to short term responses to electoral pressures and a decline in significance of belief and commitment. We have lost roughly 100 Lower House members in the past few years across State and Federal jurisdictions. We have seen Labor go from majority to minority position, in some cases holding onto Government in every jurisdiction in the country except South Australia over the past few years. We have seen devastation in the two states that gave birth to the Labor Party. If this is not a situation where Labor needs to take a good hard look at what it’s about, not just think about the next election - we always just think about the next election...

...if this is not a situation that requires that, I do not know what is.

That’s part of the picture. I don’t solely blame that.

No. No. It’s part of the picture.

I argued the point about issues and on certain issues I made a very strong point that what mattered most was having some rigour, some robustness to the policy position that we were going to be
arguing out there in the general public. When I joined the Labor Party - in many more recent times, people joined Labor to change the world. Now they join Labor to run the world. There’s a very big difference and I think that we need to get more of that passion and commitment and it’s not just about Australian Labor. New Zealand has got the same problem. The Social Democrats in Germany have got it. The Social Democrats in Sweden have got it. The Labour Party in Britain has got it. It is about structural change in our society and it is a problem for not just the Labor Party but for our political system and the strength of our democracy. We need a mainstream left of centre party that is driven by belief and we haven't been driven enough by belief in the last ten or 15 years.

Oh, yes.

Tanner: 2142

Akerman

Well, I actually tend to agree. I think that that's a very, very good point. I think that this incident has taken on a dimension that is far greater than the original crime. I think that Alan Jones expiated his sin with his numerous apologies. Obviously the public was dissatisfied with the press conference he held when he announced his first apology and he gave a totally unequivocal apology when he returned to radio. I fear that we are now seeing a new phenomenon in Australian media and this is that which I thought would occur

No, it is beyond the public. This is a manipulated thing. Tony, even my name has appeared on several of these petitions, along with Mr D Duck and M Mouse and Cotton Mather and so forth and, look, I remember back when they had fax machines and two women and a fax machine in the middle of America tried to stop an American television program and you can do it through manipulation of the numbers and the protests. I see nothing wrong with a legitimate petition but I think this is way over the top.

No one is.

Well, I would agree with you.

I'm very interested – I'm very interested that some trolls inhabited Ms Gillard's blog or whatever it was but why didn't whoever was controlling the moderation remove them immediately? Because I think...

I beg your pardon?

Well, I think that you give oxygen to these idiots by putting their remarks up there. They take enormous amount of pride, no matter which side of the divide they come from and, you know, having moderated a blog, I just don't let them on there. I think her staff have fallen down.

Hooray. Hooray.

Absolutely.

Absolutely.

We can't have people who, with due respect to our questioner here, who say “I believe in freedom of speech but...” As soon as you say “but”, you are encroaching on freedom of expression. Now, I lived in New York for at least a dozen years and was enormously impressed with the very difficult arguments that came up before the US Supreme Court over issues like flag burning and we know how Americans, unlike Australians, like to wave their flags and so on and we know how hurtful it is to
people, particularly veterans, to see the nation's flag, the flag they have fought under, burnt or mocked by being burnt or shredded or whatever and yet the US Supreme Court has said that they have freedom to do it because we have free speech and look...

I find it quite distasteful, Tony. I find it quite distasteful but I have...

I can imagine what would have happened if he'd substituted Christians and absolutely nothing would have happened because I haven't seen a Christian riot on the streets of Sydney but you have to remember that around the time that he was making this remark, we did have some grotesque gang rape trials, including, unfortunately, a young Lebanese Muslim chap, who identified himself to his victim as a Lebanese Muslim and said something along the lines of "Now, you - how do you like it Leb style? " Now, you know, I followed this thing very closely. The racist remarks were introduced in the court.

Well, I presume it will. I mean I have no doubt that the apology will come. But the young rapist is in jail. I mean justice takes time.

These things are never done quickly. I mean your fellow who does Media Watch took over 12 months to admit he was wrong in a thing that he did with The Daily Telegraph. No, I'm just saying that if it takes the ABC 12 months to make a simple apology, then I am not surprised that something rather more complex takes a little more time also.

How do you know?

Thank you, Lindsay.

I think that's a very balanced view, Lindsay. You know, the level of debate is no lower really than it has been in the past. Paul Keating was the master of, you know, the venomous invective. I look to Labor women to why they haven't apologised for remarks that were said to Sophie Mirabella when she was pregnant. I mean that was one of the most grotesque outbursts from the former member for the central coast here.

No. No. But the rest of the Labor women sat there during the and it took days for the apology.

Because at the moment...

Because at the moment Tony Abbott's responsible for Alan Jones, that's the illusion, Lindsay. I mean what we are seeing at the moment we even saw a Victorian MP on the Twitter today make some dreadful remarks linking Julia Gillard's father's death and so forth and so forth and saying that, you know, Tony Abbott was sorry not his death, the unfortunate woman who was murder and linking...

Ms Meagher and linking that with Tony Abbott. No, this is the level and now, I mean, do we expect an apology from the rest of the Labor Party for this sort of behaviour?

Well, Julia Gillard said that wives are prostitutes. I mean do you believe that she still holds that view? Absolutely. Of course she was a student at the time

Margie.

Good on you.

His deputy is a woman.

Absolutely.

Is that why you've got the shade cloths?
Shade cloths?

Yeah.

Not the teachers. Not the teachers.

A very long sentence.

Kate, I think you should talk to the very capable Mrs Abbott, because she is an early childhood specialist...

I think instead of rubbishing Mrs Abbott you actually should listen to what she says in this area. No. No. No. But your colleagues have.

Absolutely, yeah.

Well, Tony...

Well, Tony, I’m really surprised. Here we have a week - you’ve dwelt a lot with your namesake but we’ve heard nothing about the former national President of the ALP who is facing a number of very serious charges of corruption. We’ve heard nothing about the...

...Gillard’s hand-chosen Speaker, who's made the most extraordinary remarks about women. No. No. But we’re talking about where politics is today and I think the media and this show has a lot... Well, this is about politics. This is about politics...

...and you haven't addressed it.

East Timor.

Price watch.

Grocery watch.

Pink bats.

Akerman: 1059 words

Nilaja Sun

Well, do you...

Do you think that it’s that this particular statement that he said or it’s the history of statements that he said that people are just like, “Enough all ready. Enough.” We in America have a man named Russ Limbaugh and, my goodness, the things that he says but you know what? At the same time I want to hear them. I don’t him to be silenced because I want to know what he’s saying because a lot of people are listening to him. A lot of men are listening, a lot of women - especially a lot of men and I want to know, when I am walking down the street, what people are generally thinking in America so I feel like it’s, because you keep hearing this statement and what he said.

Never going to happen. It’s never going to happen.

Oh, they tried to do it with Imus, they tried to do it with Rush Limbaugh. It won’t happen because we have freedom of speech.
We have freedom of speech and so it's not going to happen and so...

But he's not sorry. But he's not sorry.

It's taken him this long. He's clearly not sorry.

Yeah.

Yeah, sure.

I'm hearing housewives, I'm hearing prostitutes.

What's going on down under? What's going on down under?

Yeah, that's right.

Yeah.

Right. And what's her name?

She's tough. I like her.

You know why? She reminds me of a very strong woman. She reminds me actually of Michelle Obama. Like if anyone were to talk about Michelle Obama's husband, Michelle wouldn't have that. You know, Michelle wouldn't have that. And that's what she did. She actually said, you know, "I'm a tough woman and this is who he loves me and this is it". I don't know how that transcends into his political views. Just because he likes a strong woman, I don't know if he actually likes to work with strong women and he believes that strong women are equal to him. So but I appreciated...

Yeah, but it’s kind of like saying my best friend is black.

I'm not prejudiced. My best friend is black.

Yes.

Those are great questions and you said my name so beautifully, thank you. It is not an easy name to say. Well, I will say this.: I started out as an actress - so I started out as an actress and I created solo work and as I was an actor in New York City, I was bartending and I was a circus clown for children's parties. Not really a circus clown. More at children’s party. And I also waited tables and I always remember the day that I waited on this man and he wanted a steak black and blue and I don't know if you know what black and blue means. It basically means black charred on the outside and blue, completely raw on the inside and as he was digging into this steak and the blood was oozing out of his mouth, I was like, I want to serve people. You know, I don't want to serve people food. I want to serve people. So what else can I do to make money and supplement my career? And so I said, “What is this new kind of career that everyone is talking about, being a teaching artist?” And what a teaching artist is is basically it’s an artist who goes into a school generally that’s arts poor, perhaps it’s an inner city school, where kids are kind of left behind in a way. Like no child left behind. Those are the kind of schools I work in and my first class, I was like, oh, my goodness. These kids really need me. I don't know why I was like they need so much art. They need art. They need passion and they need to, I guess...

Oh, yeah.

But you know what, I don't think of them as rowdy. I just think imagine a child who is five years old, maybe six years old and he wants his attention from mum, wants attention from dad who is not there, wants attention from the world and the world is not giving it to him. And then that child grows up, six, seven, eight and imagine how much angrier and angrier he gets, right? And so now the world sees
him as this - almost like this animal and then I come along and all I see is the beauty that is him. So, in fact, going from acting, which is - it's a great gig. Let me tell you. It's fabulous. And then you can - and people laugh at your jokes and la, la, la, la, la. But then going from that to teaching and truly serving people, now this is the career that has truly saved my life. It is not my acting, it's my teaching, and they inform each other.

Yes.

The Bush Administration.

Well, it's more like a sexy title. I wanted to make sure that when people walked into the show they knew that they were watching a piece about education and about teachers because that's one of the reasons I have been performing this piece for over 700 times. I love teachers. I want to make sure we highlight teachers and we show the glorious work, the miraculous work that's being done in classrooms all over this world.

Right. It sure did. I'm so sorry. Don't kick me out of your country. I love you. Yeah. Right. Right. Right. That's one of the reasons why I wrote the play. It's because the No Child Left Behind Act was kind of like the pink elephant in the room with teachers. Everyone kind of really didn't like it and one of the biggest reasons why is because teachers felt that they had to teach tests. They had to teach kids how to pass a test. They weren't teaching history. Weren't teaching English. Weren't teaching science. It was just how to pass that test and then what happens afterwards, just like you said, it goes in one ear and out and then you're a college kid, you're at graduate school and you're like what did I learn all my life? I don't know. Really, I don't know. And so, yeah, I don't know how it happened. Perhaps one of the panellist can...

Yeah. Well, when you're told - when you're - hmm. When you're told your school will get funding if a certain amount of your kids pass the test, and maybe 98% of your kids just got to this country like two years ago, you kind of are like, oh, God, how do we get this? How do we get this? And so I think that's probably how cheating happens. Unfortunately it is so unfortunate.

I'm sure it is.

No, actually, yeah, we have...

We're also talking about something about five years ago. We have a race to the top now with Obama and it's much different. It's more of a multifaceted scoring system.

Having just finished reading a book by the beautiful Republican no longer in office, Arnold Schwarzenegger, one of his biggest life lessons "Don't over-think."

Sun: 1205 words

Ellis

Well, I was hoping it would take a little bit longer for me to disagree entirely with Piers but I have reached that point in record time tonight. I just think when you have a look at the original crime, as you put it, we shouldn't be trying to dismiss or justify it.

Like whatever your politics are, whatever side of politics you come from, let's actually look at the fact that if somebody loses a parent that is heartbreaking, no matter who you are and to have somebody
else stand up and joke that that parent died because they were so ashamed of you is appalling and the public were right to be appalled by that and to express that in a strong and powerful way.

Well, I think – and I understand that was a small percentage of people, but, yes, we should be saying, people should be civil with one another, no matter what forum they’re engaging with. Whether we are having a discussion on Q&A, whether it’s on social media, whether it’s at a private party fund raiser, no matter where it is, we should have some leadership saying that there is an appropriate tone to debate and discussion and that hasn’t been reached far too often of late.

That’s when I get worried, Piers.

Does anybody here know how Facebook actually works?

Like people post on a wall and you delete it if you don’t agree with it. People post first and then you delete it?

Well, they did. Once they were put up, they were removed.

I’m pleased to hear you say that.

We haven’t said anything about you, Tony.

Well, look, I think those comments are entirely offensive, entirely inappropriate and the question that was asked is about freedom of speech and does that come with caveats and I disagree that you can’t have a but. You have a but to everything. Freedom of speech is a right but it comes with a responsibility and I believe that that responsibility is that our leaders should set the standards of what is appropriate community discussion and when people step over the mark, they should be condemned and they should not be they should be made to apologise and I think...

No, but can I just ...

I have absolutely no idea why anyone would talk to Alan Jones.

I cannot answer that question.

But …

Yeah, she did.

Well, can I just say first up what I’m not going to take is a lecture from Piers Akerman on women issues and how women feel about issues in this country and I am really glad we’re actually able to speak on this. Going back to the actual question, I mean I think there is a couple of different issues here. What Australian women have been concerned about is not that Tony Abbott does not love his wife. Of course he does. It is not that Tony Abbott doesn’t love his daughters. It is not even whether Tony Abbott likes Downton Abbey or not. Like that was all very nice...

That was all nice but it’s completely...

...irrelevant to the concerns of Australian women...

...and that is, if you’re going to...

...if you’re going to...

Well, if you’re going to put yourself up as the alternative Prime Minister, then I think that people are going to say are you going to be a Prime Minister that is going to progress women’s issues and
women's rights? What is your history of fighting for women's control of women's bodies? What is your history of standing up and saying that women are the housewives and doing the ironing? What is your history over a number of years and that is...

That is not true, Christopher. He has said that.

He said that in 2010 when he was talking about the carbon tax.

So there's plenty of evidence of that.

He was talking about the effects of the carbon tax...

...and he talked about the impact it would be on the housewives who are busy doing the ironing. That is a fact and that is what people are concerned about is does Tony Abbott have a view of women that is outdated or does he have a view of women that we have rights and opportunities and that we want to continue to progress those. That's what the concerns and I think they're legitimate.

Exactly.

Exactly.

What about RU 486?

Well, I just think if you want to talk about his record and if you want to talk about his record as Health Minister, I think we should talk about his record over a number of decades. But if you want to talk about when he was Health Minister, why don't you talk about the way he restricted access to RU 486 for Australian women across the country because his religious views did not agree with that. Let's talk about that because is his record...

That is his record and he had to be overruled by the parliament when we voted in a conscience vote because, as Health Minister, he refused to do it.

Well...

Can I just say that...

Well, I just think we need to be clear that - well, first of all I just wanted to say that I love your passion for teaching and I loved hearing about the work you're doing. My mother is a primary school teacher still and she's watching tonight. So thank you, mum. But I think we need to be really clear that our education system here is very different to the US model that we're talking about and we're not talking about the same testing. We're not talking about the same program. In fact, we had the chance to learn a lot from US experiences and I think that what we need to be very clear upon is that NAPLAN is a tiny part of our educational reforms and NAPLAN is not a test just for the sake of a test. It's a test for the sake of...

...making sure that parents have information, which I believe parents are entitled to but more so that we know where to put resources and where to invest in lifting people up because we want to make sure that no matter what school you're enrolled in in Australia it's a great school.

Well, is that why we invested in school facilities in every single school across the country?

Yes, because we believe infrastructure...

Well, you can mock it all you like...

Well, I'd like to know if there is a single school in Christopher's electorate that the BER project hasn't been welcomed and hasn't been well utilised and well needed.
But I think what we’re talking about is two very different things.

We’re comparing apples and oranges.

Well, no.

You’re talking about funding if people pass the test. (Indistinct)
Yeah. And I think it’s entirely in how you use that information. You have to use that information in a way...

...that lifts up disadvantaged communities and that’s how we’ve structured the program here in Australia.

Well, I actually agree with Lindsay’s point around getting to the baby bonus and education and putting them together. I don’t think that doesn’t make sense but when we look at your question about should we be finding more resources for education? I think absolutely. Should we be investing in the best way to transform peoples’ lives to ensure that they have greater opportunities than their parents and grandparents? Absolutely. And that’s why we have committed to taking real action and bringing on board real reform and it’s why we’ve already...

It’s why we’ve already doubled funding to schools in Australia and have committed to looking at the next steps and to Gonski and finding the way forward.

Well, you’re going to see that in...

Well, you’re going to see that in...

Well, you didn’t give me any policies there, Christopher.

Plus the ones that you’re pulling out.

The $425 million you’re pulling out of the national partnerships, the trades training centres you’re pulling out.

Yeah.

No, we’re committed to...

We are committed to...

...improving the system. You are committing here to keeping things exactly the same.

Which is exactly what we’re going to do. You put nothing on the table.

Well, thank you for your question. I know there is lots of Big Steppers right around Australia that will be very pleased that you got to ask that question. But more so, first of all, it’s by valuing the staff in early childhood right across Australia. Now, I’m really proud that we’ve seen a huge expansion in the early childhood sector. We’ve seen an extra 9% of Australian children in early childhood services this year, which means that we have more services, we need more staff and we’re also lifting the quality at the same time. Now, that means that we need to find a way that we can make sure that child care remains affordable and that’s something that our Government has been incredibly committed to, tripling the expenditure in the area, but we also need to make sure that we’re valuing our staff, which is where the balancing act comes in. Now, the Coalition and the Federal Opposition have made it very clear that they don’t think they have a role to play there.

Yeah, I’m getting there. I’m getting there, Christopher.
I heard the question.

Well, if I could finish...

If I could finish the one sentence I was in the middle of when I was interrupted there.

I was actually saying that we have...

...we have more staff working in the sector than we’ve ever had before. We have a huge expansion as a result of the fact that our Government has massively increased affordability assistance to families, meaning there’s more children. But, of course, we’ve said that we need to keep working with the sector on what the next steps are. We’re not prepared to wipe our hands of them. We know that that means that we need to find a way to keep staff and to keep fees affordable because we know how important it is and we know that it actually changes children’s’ lives. Now, am I going to pull out a cheque book on Q&A here tonight? No, obviously...

Yeah, thanks. No, obviously I’m not.

No, that is what you party said in question time that we promised. There was no such commitment.

Well, I’m talking to an early childhood specialist right here and I’m saying thank you for the amazing work that you’re doing. We value it. We know how important it is but we’ve got to keep child care affordable because we know that families rely on it.

I’ve never rubbished Mrs Abbott but thanks for putting those words in my mouth.

Well, I absolutely would.

And I’d just say that I don’t share Lindsay’s diagnosis at all and I think that if there is a criticism of this Government, it cannot be short-term policy making. When you have look at real policies to increase...to increase superannuation from 9 to 12%; to increase the retirement age; to bring in a price on carbon...

...to build a National Broadband Network, none of these are in place...

...by the next election.

This is about building our country for the challenges of the future.

This is because we...

...absolutely have a purpose... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

...and we’re very clear about it...

...and despite these interruptions, are going to remain absolutely focused on it.

Ellis: 1962 words

Tony Jones: Good evening and welcome to Q&A. I’m Tony Jones and answering your questions tonight: former Rudd Cabinet insider and Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner; Liberal Party strategist and Spokesman on Education Christopher Pyne; actor Nilaja Sun, whose play No Child is based on her time teaching in New York’s toughest schools; the Minister for Employment, Participate and Early
Childhood Education Kate Ellis; and News Limited political economist Piers Akerman. Please welcome our panel.

Thank you. Q&A is live from 9.35 Eastern Daylight Saving Time. It is simulcast on News 24 and News Radio. Go to our website to send a question or join the Twitter conversation using the hashtag on your screen. We’ll start tonight with a question from Matt Jones.

ALAN JONES V ONLINE LYNCH MOB?

MATT JONES: Thanks, Tony. Was the community response to Alan Jones’ comment disproportionate and are we seeing the face of a lynch mob mentality emerge in the way protests are organised in Australia?

TONY JONES: Piers Akerman?

PIERS AKERMAN: Well, I actually tend to agree. I think that that’s a very, very good point. I think that this incident has taken on a dimension that is far greater than the original crime. I think that Alan Jones expiated his sin with his numerous apologies. Obviously the public was dissatisfied with the press conference he held when he announced his first apology and he gave a totally unequivocal apology when he returned to radio. I fear that we are now seeing a new phenomenon in Australian media and this is the which I thought would occur.

TONY JONES: What, the public having a say?

PIERS AKERMAN: No, it is beyond the public. This is a manipulated thing. Tony, even my name has appeared on several of these petitions, along with Mr D Duck and M Mouse and Cotton Mather and so forth and, look, I remember back when they had fax machines and two women and a fax machine in the middle of America tried to stop an American television program and you can do it through manipulation of the numbers and the protests. I see nothing wrong with a legitimate petition but I think this is way over the top.

TONY JONES: Kate Ellis?

KATE ELLIS: Well, I was hoping it would take a little bit longer for me to disagree entirely with Piers but I have reached that point in record time tonight. I just think when you have a look at the original crime, as you put it, we shouldn't be trying to dismiss or justify it.

PIERS AKERMAN: No one is.

(Tony's interjection with Ellis)

KATE ELLIS: Like whatever your politics are, whatever side of politics you come from, let's actually look at the fact that if somebody loses a parent that is heartbreaking, no matter who you are and to have somebody else stand up and joke that that parent died because they were so ashamed of you is appalling and the public were right to be appalled by that and to express that in a strong and powerful way.

TONY JONES: That's been repeated today in some respects. Julia Gillard did an online Facebook interview and trolls got on board and more insults along the same lines.

KATE ELLIS: Well, I think – and I understand that was a small percentage of people, but, yes, we should be saying, people should be civil with one another, no matter what forum they’re engaging with. Whether we are having a discussion on Q&A, whether it’s on social media, whether it’s at a private party fund raiser, no matter where it is, we should have some leadership saying that there is
an appropriate tone to debate and discussion and that hasn't been reached far too often of late.

PIERS AKERM AN: Well, I would agree with you.

KATE ELLIS: That's when I get worried, Piers.

PIERS AKERM AN: I'm very interested – I'm very interested that some trolls inhabited Ms Gillard's blog or whatever it was but why didn't whoever was controlling the moderation remove them immediately? Because I think... (Pyne interrupts Akerman)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Her staff. Her staff are moderating it, Piers.

PIERS AKERM AN: I beg your pardon?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Her staff are moderating it.

PIERS AKERM AN: Well, I think that you give oxygen to these idiots by putting their remarks up there. They take enormous amount of pride, no matter which side of the divide they come from and, you know, having moderated a blog, I just don't let them on there. I think her staff have fallen down.

TONY JONES: Okay. All right. I'm going to hear from the rest of the panel. Christopher Pyne, you jumped in there.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, just on the blog...

TONY JONES: Are you suggesting that the staff had some role in this?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, I don't know, Tony, but I do think it is peculiar that since her staff are moderating the Facebook discussion, they allowed trolls to breakthrough... (Ellis interrupts Pyne)

KATE ELLIS: Does anybody here know how Facebook actually works?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Yeah, we do but... (Ellis interrupts Pyne)

KATE ELLIS: Like people post on a wall and you delete it if you don't agree with it. People post first and then you delete it?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, why didn't her staff moderate those remarks off instantaneously. Why did they live them on there and them make a big political story out of it?

KATE ELLIS: Well, they did. Once they were put up, they were removed.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I just think it's passing strange that if her staff were moderating this apparent first in national politics, that they allowed these very unpleasant statements to be put up on the Facebook rather than, as soon as they appeared, removing them instantaneously, which didn't happen. So I think that's peculiar.

TONY JONES: Christopher Pyne, let's go to the question that was asked here. It was about Alan Jones and whether there is a lynch mob mentality at play here? Do you think there is?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, I think Alan Jones' comments were crass and unacceptable.

KATE ELLIS: I'm pleased to hear you say that.
CHRISTOPHER PYNE: And I'm glad that, one, he apologised and, two, everybody has basically condemned Alan Jones, from the local store keeper to the Leader of the Opposition, and so they should have. And he's accepted that and he's apologised. I do think, though, that Labor has rather unpleasantly tried to use this issue to continue to distract people from the issues that main street Australia are concerned about. Now, apparently these remarks are so egregious and ghastly they must never be repeated and yet Kate Ellis has repeated them tonight and, in fact, Labor ministers have been repeating them for a week. Ever since Alan Jones, the story, broke, Labor ministers can't get to a microphone fast enough to repeat these remarks.

TONY JONES: It was a... (Pyne interrupts Jones)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Now, if we're all do deeply offended by them... (Jones interrupts Pyne)

TONY JONES: It was a Young Liberal Party function, let's remember that.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: But if we're all so... (Jones interrupts Pyne)

TONY JONES: Quite a few of them did not repeat the remarks immediately afterwards until a reporter with a secret recording came forward.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The Labor ministers have been repeating them for a week, ad nauseam, in front of every microphone. So as a person who's been around politics for a while, it suggests to me that what they've actually been doing is trying to make political capital out of this issue and I think that is disgraceful and I think that Alan Jones' comments are utterly, you know, exceptional and grotesque and I also think that the comments that Labor ministers have been making about Tony Jones as a - Tony Abbott.

KATE ELLIS: We haven't said anything about you, Tony.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: There's so many - Alan Jones and Tony Jones and another Jones asked the question.

LINDSAY TANNER: It's all very confusing.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: It's deliberately confusing but I think the... (Jones interrupts Pyne)

TONY JONES: I'm nowhere near as sensitive.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Remarks about Tony Abbott about supposedly being a misogynist are deeply offensive. Basically the Labor Party is saying he hates his wife, his three daughters and his two sisters... (Jones interrupts Pyne)

TONY JONES: All right. Okay. We will - there are questions... (Pyne interrupts Jones)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: And, yet, there's no public reaction to that at all.

TONY JONES: There are questions relating to that issue.

NILAJA SUN: Well, do you... (Jones interrupts Sun)

TONY JONES: Let's got to Lindsay... (Sun interrupts Jones)
NILAJA SUN: Do you think... (Jones interrupts Sun)

TONY JONES: Sorry, go ahead.

NILAJA SUN: Do you think that it’s that this particular statement that he said or it’s the history of statements that he said that people are just like, “Enough all ready. Enough.” We in America have a man named Russ Limbaugh and, my goodness, the things that he says but you know what? At the same time I want to hear them. I don’t him to be silenced because I want to know what he’s saying because a lot of people are listening to him. A lot of men are listening, a lot of women - especially a lot of men and I want to know, when I am walking down the street, what people are generally thinking in America so I feel like it’s, because you keep hearing this statement and what he said.

TONY JONES: So what do you think about a social media campaign aimed at (a) getting him off air and (b) stopping his advertisers.

NILAJA SUN: Never going to happen. It’s never going to happen.

TONY JONES: Not in the States.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: It won’t happen here.

NILAJA SUN: Oh, they tried to do it with Imus, they tried to do it with Rush Limbaugh. It won’t happen because we have freedom of speech.


NILAJA SUN: We have freedom of speech and so it’s not going to happen and so... (Pyne interrupts Sun)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, we can be appalled by Alan Jones’ comments but I also think that the attacks on small business people who advertise with Alan Jones - it’s ironic that people who are saying Alan Jones’ remarks are unacceptable are using the most egregious descriptions to describe the small business people who advertise with Alan Jones.

TONY JONES: Lindsay Tanner, let’s hear from you.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Are people missing the irony of that extraordinary campaign? (Pyne interjects

LINDSAY TANNER: Tony, I find it hard to get distressed about Alan Jones getting a dose of his own medicine and to me there is something of a culmination of a long pattern here and it’s been long overdue but when it is due to end, I think that’s a legitimate question. We have got bigger issues to worry about in this country.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Hear, hear.

LINDSAY TANNER: And I know the people I work with, I don't think they're worried too much about this issue now. My mates at the Tilden Fire Brigade where I volunteer, I don't think they're too concerned about it anymore. One of the things that does distress me about it is the ability for people just to keep feeding off it and feeding off it and feeding off it. I'm no fan of Alan Jones. I think he's outrageous. I think what he did was outrageous but surely, for God's sake, we've got more serious things in this country that we should be talking about.
PIERS AKERMAN: Absolutely.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Hear, hear.

PIERS AKERMAN: Absolutely.

TONY JONES: There's a lady down the front with her hand up and we'll just try and get a microphone to you in a minute. In the meantime, let's go to Robert Magyar.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH 00:09:50

ROBERT MAGYAR: I've always considered freedom of speech to be one of the most important rights I have as an individual, but after the Alan Jones' incident I found myself questioning...

TONY JONES: We'll have to get you to repeat the beginning of the question. We just missed that.

ROBERT MAGYAR: Yep. Sorry. I have always considered freedom of speech to be one of my most important rights as an individual but after the Alan Jones's incident I found myself questioning the limits of this right. We live in a society where individuals can not only denigrate a man who has passed away, but vilify Lebanese Muslims and then these actions are justified under freedom of speech. I would ask the panel what are the limits to what we can say and how we can speak our minds?

TONY JONES: Lindsay Tanner, I'll pick you back up then on that question.

LINDSAY TANNER: Look, I think it's very important that we do defend freedom of speech in this country and the critical thing to remember is that essentially it's freedom for people to say things we don't like and one of the... (Jones interrupts Tanner)

TONY JONES: Can I just interrupt there? Because the questioner asked about the vilification of Muslims.

LINDSAY TANNER: Yes.

TONY JONES: And, of course, in 2005, before the Cronulla riots, Alan Jones was responsible for making a whole series of outrageous and some argue, racist or incitement to racial hatred style remarks in the lead up to those riots. Did that cross the boundary?

LINDSAY TANNER: Look, I suspect it might have but without having the full transcript of the various comments he made in front of me and being able to connect that in time with actual events, it's a bit difficult to draw a full conclusion but certainly those were appalling comments and, I think, raise the question of whether there was some kind of direct incitement to breaking the law, to violence. I think that's a legitimate question to ask there but I wouldn't want to actually say definitively, yes, that happened without examining it much more closely. I've got a memory of the events but it's quite some time ago. But on freedom of speech, the critical thing we have always got to remember is that is about freedom for people to say and write things and publish things that we don't like, not things that we do like but things we don't like and I'm very concerned that we've got a report that's been delivered to the Government which, thankfully, it appears to not going to be proceeded with that we're going to have more regulation of content in our media on the basis that in some way it might be inappropriate or wrong or that it's hurtful to some people. Much as I dislike some of our media, much as I am ultra-critical of it, I still think it's important that we defend freedom of speech as a general cornerstone of
our society.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Hear, hear.

TONY JONES: Piers Akerman, I’ll bring you back in there. Are there any limits to free speech in your opinion?

PIERS AKERMAN: We can't have people who, with due respect to our questioner here, who say “I believe in freedom of speech but...” As soon as you say “but”, you are encroaching on freedom of expression. Now, I lived in New York for at least a dozen years and was enormously impressed with the very difficult arguments that came up before the US Supreme Court over issues like flag burning and we know how Americans, unlike Australians, like to wave their flags and so on and we know how hurtful it is to people, particularly veterans, to see the nation's flag, the flag they have fought under, burnt or mocked by being burnt or shredded or whatever and yet the US Supreme Court has said that they have freedom to do it because we have free speech and look... (Jones interrupts Akerman)

TONY JONES: Let me just cut in. I mean are there limits along these lines: the questioner asked about the vilification of Lebanese Muslims. Before the Cronulla riots, Jones described Lebanese Muslims as vermin, as mongrels who simply rape, pillage and plunder the nation that has taken them in. Is that acceptable free speech?

PIERS AKERMAN: I find it quite distasteful, Tony. I find it quite distasteful but I have... (Tanner interrupts Akerman)

LINDSAY TANNER: Could you imagine what would have happen to him if he'd substituted the Lebanese Muslims for Jews and he was describing Jews as vermin? Can you imagine?

PIERS AKERMAN: I can imagine what would have happened if he'd substituted Christians and absolutely nothing would have happened because I haven't seen a Christian riot on the streets of Sydney but you have to remember that around the time that he was making this remark, we did have some grotesque gang rape trials, including, unfortunately, a young Lebanese Muslim chap, who identified himself to his victim as a Lebanese Muslim and said something along the lines of "Now, you - how do you like it Leb style? " Now, you know, I followed this thing very closely. The racist remarks were introduced in the court.

TONY JONES: Well, can I tell you, the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal followed it very closely and said that he had committed an incitement to hatred, serious contempt and severe ridicule of Lebanese Muslims. He appealed that and now his appeal has been lost and he's been asked to apologise. That apology has not been forthcoming.

PIERS AKERMAN: Well, I presume it will. I mean I have no doubt that the apology will come. But the young rapist is in jail. I mean justice takes time.

TONY JONES: Okay.

PIERS AKERMAN: These things are never done quickly. I mean your fellow who does Media Watch took over 12 months to admit he was wrong in a thing that he did with The Daily Telegraph.

TONY JONES: Are you equating the two things, seriously?

PIERS AKERMAN: No, I'm just saying that if it takes the ABC 12 months to make a simple apology, then I am not surprised that something rather more complex takes a little more time also.
TONY JONES: Seven years we're talking. Kate Ellis, Alan Jones did make those comments. Are they acceptable as free speech and if they are not, why did so many politicians on both sides, including the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition continue to go on his program? Why did his advertisers stay with him after those comments?

KATE ELLIS: Well, look, I think those comments are entirely offensive, entirely inappropriate and the question that was asked is about freedom of speech and does that come with caveats and I disagree that you can't have a but. You have a but to everything. Freedom of speech is a right but it comes with a responsibility and I believe that that responsibility is that our leaders should set the standards of what is appropriate community discussion and when people step over the mark, they should be condemned and they should not be they should be made to apologise and I think...

TONY JONES: But can I bring you to the question...

KATE ELLIS: No, but can I just...

TONY JONES: Why would political leaders, supposedly setting an example, continue to go on his radio program after he made those comments?

KATE ELLIS: I have absolutely no idea why anyone would talk to Alan Jones.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Because it's a free country.

KATE ELLIS: I cannot answer that question.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Because it's a free country.

TONY JONES: Christopher Pyne?

KATE ELLIS: But...

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The point is it's a free country, Tony. Now, I don't have any regard for the remarks that you have read out that Alan Jones made about Lebanese Muslims. I am not sure if it was specific to a group of people or whether it was more broader remarks. It wasn't...

TONY JONES: Well, would you like me to read out a few more?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, you've read out a bit already but you obviously want to get them out there.

TONY JONES: “I'll tell you what kind of grubs these were. These lot were Middle Eastern grubs. My suggestion is to invite biker gangs to be present at Cronulla railway station when the Lebanese thugs arrive. Australians old and new should not have to put up with this sort of scum.”

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, obviously if the appropriate body has found against him he should apologise. But they didn't find against him seven years ago. He appealed that and more recently he's failed to apologise but perhaps he'll get around to doing that very soon. I hope he does if that is the correct admonition for him. I'm surprised...
NILAJA SUN: But he's not sorry. But he's not sorry.

PIERS AKERMAN: How do you know?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: But, look, the point about freedom of speech, to go back to the question... (Sun interrupts Pyne)

NILAJA SUN: It's taken him this long. He's clearly not sorry.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The point about freedom of speech is the man shouldn't be made to be sorry.

NILAJA SUN: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The man should be made to face the tribunal's admonition. But I am reminded of my constituent who rang me many years ago, who was complaining about movies on the SBS and she was an elderly lady and she said they were disgusting and grotesque and as a consequence she had to ask her neighbour to come in and watch them with her because she couldn't believe how dreadful they were and I said to her, "Madam, if you don't like the movies on SBS, change the channel." At the end of the day, if people don't like Alan Jones, don't listen to him. Turn him off. And that is, in a free democracy like ours, that is the final answer on anybody who we don't like what they say, don't listen to them. Don't read what they write.

TONY JONES: Okay. Lindsay Tanner, do you want a final comment on this?

LINDSAY TANNER: Just to hope that we can have an Alan Jones free zone for the rest of the show.

PIERS AKERMAN: Thank you, Lindsay.

TONY JONES: Well, it is time to move along. You're watching Q&A. Our next question comes from Georgina Freeman.

ABBOTT AND WOMEN

GEORGINA FREEMAN: Last week we saw Tony Abbott's wife and female family members take to the media to defend sensitive Tony as a loving husband and a man who is not an anti-woman crusade. For several years Tony Abbott has made nasty, vicious attacks on Julia Gillard and no one from his party room has called him on it, therefore endorsing his abhorrent behaviour. He's demonstrated a pattern of behaviour towards women dating back to his university years which just shows that the man is not capable of respecting women in the public sphere. How can Federal Liberal continue to endorse Mr Abbott as their leader?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, I reject what is more of a paid advertisement for the or unpaid advertisement for the Labor Party than it is actually a genuine question.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, I reject what is more of a paid advertisement for the or unpaid advertisement for the Labor Party than it is actually a genuine question.

GEORGINA FREEMAN: Really?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Can I just say that some of the things you've said are complete assertions that have been utterly denied by Tony Abbott and you stated them as facts. That's the first thing. Secondly, the Tony Abbott I know is a person who has absolute regard for strong women and surrounds himself with them. His wife, Margie, his chief of staff Peta Credlin. He loves and respects his three daughters and his two sisters. To suggest that Tony Abbott is a misogynist is part of a smear
campaign designed to stop him becoming Prime Minister and let me say this: it is a distraction from the issues like cost of living pressures, job insecurity, the economy, and Labor wants us to have that distraction. They want the Australian public to talk about everything other than the economy, job insecurity, cost of living and the carbon tax and unfortunately that question falls for that Labor Party campaign. To Margie Abbott came out on Friday, because she was thoroughly sick of people telling bald faced lies about her husband. Tanya Plibersek, Nicola Roxon, unfortunately Kate Ellis, others have been responsible for this, what's been dubbed the handbag hit squad. It is an outrage what people have said about Tony Abbott and it is as offensive to suggest he hates his wife, his three daughters and his two sisters...

GEORGINA FREEMAN: I didn’t say he hates his wife.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: ...as the things Alan Jones said about Julia Gillard's father.

TONY JONES: I'll just go back to our questioner because you have suggested it is a paid political...

(Pyne interrupts Jones)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I corrected myself and said unpaid political advertisement for the Labor Party.

GEORGINA FREEMAN: Certainly not. Despicable.

TONY JONES: Lindsay Tanner, is Labor playing up to this notion in order to make political capital?

LINDSAY TANNER: Look, to be honest I haven't followed the ins and outs of this closely, Tony. I have picked up in the ether the general positions here but. I think Christopher is somewhat exaggerating the nature of Labor's critique of Tony Abbott for effect but there is a wider question that I think everybody is entitled to ask which is - and whether it's about any leading politician is: does this political leader understand me? Do they understand my aspirations, my life, the experiences I have, my fears, my concerns and can I entrust them with leading the nation knowing that they will have my kind of person at heart? So it is legitimate for people to ask the question does a political leader, particularly a male political leader, understand women? I suspect that from time to time things get a bit robust in both directions. There is certainly plenty of examples I can remember when I was in parliament when Tony Abbott, I think, pretty much crossed the line in terms of his critique of individuals. He was particularly nasty to Cheryl Kernot. I remember that very, very well. So in some respects if you dish it out, you've got to take it. Now, I haven't followed the detail of what's has been said in recent times closely enough to really have a view about it, to be honest. But if you're up there putting yourself up as the would-be leader of the nation, you're going to cop that stuff. Kevin Rudd had a lot of nasty stuff flow around about him at the time. John Howard had plenty of terrible things said about him. Kim Beazley did. So whether this is hugely different from that, I am not quite sure.

TONY JONES: Piers Akerman?

PIERS AKERMAN: I think that's a very balanced view, Lindsay. You know, the level of debate is no lower really than it has been in the past. Paul Keating was the master of, you know, the venomous invective. I look to Labor women to why they haven't apologised for remarks that were said to Sophie Mirabella when she was pregnant. I mean that was one of the most grotesque outbursts from the former member for the central coast here.

LINDSAY TANNER: I think she did apologise in parliament, didn't she?

KATE ELLIS: Yeah, she did.
CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The Labour women didn’t but nothing is said about that.

PIERS AKERMAN: No. No. But the rest of the Labor women sat there during the and it took days for the apology.

LINDSAY TANNER: Well, it was in the main committee. I don’t think any of them were there and why should they be seen as having responsibility for that just because they’re female?

PIERS AKERMAN: Because at the moment... (Akerman interrupted by Pyne)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Because at the moment they’re leading the handbag hit squad.

PIERS AKERMAN: Because at the moment Tony Abbott’s responsible for Alan Jones, that’s the illusion, Lindsay. I mean what we are seeing at the moment we even saw a Victorian MP on the Twitter today make some dreadful remarks linking Julia Gillard’s father’s death and so forth and so forth and saying that, you know, Tony Abbott was sorry not his death, the unfortunate woman who was murder and linking... (Pyne interrupts Akerman)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Jill Meagher. Jill Meagher.

PIERS AKERMAN: Jill Meagher.

LINDSAY TANNER: Jill Meagher.

PIERS AKERMAN: Ms Meagher and linking that with Tony Abbott. No, this is the level and now, I mean, do we expect an apology from the rest of the Labor Party for this sort of behaviour?

TONY JONES: Kate Ellis?

KATE ELLIS: Well, can I just say first up what I’m not going to take is a lecture from Piers Akerman on women issues and how women feel about issues in this country and I am really glad we’re actually able to speak on this. Going back to the actual question, I mean I think there is a couple of different issues here. What Australian women have been concerned about is not that Tony Abbott does not love his wife. Of course he does. It is not that Tony Abbott doesn’t love his daughters. It is not even whether Tony Abbott likes Downton Abbey or not. Like that was all very nice... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: It’s a disgraceful campaign, Kate.

KATE ELLIS: That was all nice but it’s completely... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: It’s an orchestrated campaign.

KATE ELLIS: ...irrelevant to the concerns of Australian women... (Tanner interrupts Ellis)

LINDSAY TANNER: Don’t you like Downton Abbey either?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I love Downton Abbey. (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

KATE ELLIS: ...and that is, if you’re going to... (Tanner interrupts Ellis)

LINDSAY TANNER: It’s a very good show.
KATE ELLIS: ...if you’re going to... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I like the Dowager Duchess too. I think she’s hysterical.

LINDSAY TANNER: Maggie Smith is sensational. Sensational. (Tanner interrupts Ellis)

TONY JONES: Can we allow the comments to continue?

KATE ELLIS: Well, if you’re going to put yourself up as the alternative Prime Minister, then I think that people are going to say are you going to be a Prime Minister that is going to progress women’s issues and women’s rights? What is your history of fighting for women’s control of women’s bodies? What is your history of standing up and saying that women are the housewives and doing the ironing? What is your history over a number of years and that is... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: He never said that. You’re just making things up.

KATE ELLIS: That is not true, Christopher. He has said that.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Rubbish.

KATE ELLIS: He said that in 2010 when he was talking about the carbon tax.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Rubbish.

KATE ELLIS: So there’s plenty of evidence of that.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: He didn’t say women were housewives who did the ironing.

KATE ELLIS: He was talking about the effects of the carbon tax... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: That is a complete false statement.

KATE ELLIS: ...and he talked about the impact it would be on the housewives who are busy doing the ironing. That is a fact and that is what people are concerned about is does Tony Abbott have a view of women that is outdated or does he have a view of women that we have rights and opportunities and that we want to continue to progress those. That’s what the concerns and I think they’re legitimate.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: What about when he was Health Minister?

TONY JONES: Before we go on, we have people with their hands up. (Jones interrupts Pyne)

KATE ELLIS: Exactly.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: He did an excellent job as Health Minister for women and (indistinct)... (Jones interrupts Pyne)

TONY JONES: Just hang on, Christopher. I’m just going to take a question from the audience. Go ahead.

ABBOTT AND WOMEN00:26:20

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I’m just a little confused, Christopher, with your comments because there’s
actually proof that Tony Abbott has said misogynistic things, such as women such as are physiologically different so they won’t ever be in positions of power because they’re so different to men and this was in at Sydney University, my uni, in the student paper, Honi Soit, back when he was involved in the SRC and that is in records in the paper so if anyone wants to see it, it’s... (Pyne interrupts audience member)


AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes. But like those - do those beliefs change? Like if you believe in something like that, does that change?

PIERS AKERMAN: Well, Julia Gillard said that wives are prostitutes. I mean do you believe that she still holds that view?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What? What?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Really?

PIERS AKERMAN: Absolutely. Of course she was a student at the time.

TONY JONES: Christopher Pyne, the (indistinct)... (Jones interrupts by Pyne)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: She moved motion. Well, I think people say all sorts of things when they’re at university which they come to regret later in life and the idea that somebody should... (Tanner interrupts Pyne)

LINDSAY TANNER: I won't tell them what you said if you don't tell them what I said. How about that.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: That somebody should be held to something they said in 1977 when they were an 18 year old student, I think, is ridiculous, quite frankly.

TONY JONES: Can I just bring in Nilaja here.

NILAJA SUN: Yeah, sure.

TONY JONES: Watching this discussion...(Sun interrupts Jones)

NILAJA SUN: I’m hearing housewives, I’m hearing prostitutes.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: What’s going on. (Pyne interjects Sun)

NILAJA SUN: What’s going on down under? What’s going on down under?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: This is a family show.

NILAJA SUN: Yeah, that’s right.

LINDSAY TANNER: That’s right.

TONY JONES: It is not unknown in the United States for politicians to bring their wives out into the public to sort of humanise them.
NILAJA SUN: Yeah.

TONY JONES: It's happened, obviously, the presidential campaign on both sides. Tony Abbott did it recently or Tony Abbott's wife came out recently to, in a way, tell us more about him.

NILAJA SUN: Right. And what's her name?

TONY JONES: Margie.

PIERS AKERMAN: Margie.

NILAJA SUN: She's tough. I like her.

PIERS AKERMAN: Good on you.

NILAJA SUN: You know why? She reminds me of a very strong woman. She reminds me actually of Michelle Obama. Like if anyone were to talk about Michelle Obama's husband, Michelle wouldn't have that. You know, Michelle wouldn't have that. And that's what she did. She actually said, you know, "I'm a tough woman and this is who he loves me and this is it". I don't know how that transcends into his political views. Just because he likes a strong woman, I don't know if he actually likes to work with strong women and he believes that strong women are equal to him. So but I appreciated... [Pyne interrupts Sun]

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: His chief of staff is a woman as well, Peta Credlin.

NILAJA SUN: Yeah, but it's kind of like saying my best friend is black.

KATE ELLIS: Exactly.

PIERS AKERMAN: His deputy is a woman.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: His deputy is a woman.

NILAJA SUN: I'm not prejudiced. My best friend is black.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: His deputy is a woman as well.

TONY JONES: Okay, I'm going to another question from the audience. [Pyne interrupts Jones]

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: He's surrounded by women. God knows how there's any room for any of us who aren't women.

LINDSAY TANNER: He's actually met some women. [Tanner interrupts Jones]

TONY JONES: Christopher, there is room, however, for someone to ask a question from the audience.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Sure.

TONY JONES: Let's go to Clare Angel-Auld.

WHO'S A FEMINIST? 00:28:53
CLARE ANGEL-AULD: So my question is to Christopher Pyne. Recently Margie Abbott has referred to her husband as a feminist. Besides having three daughters, what do you think actually qualifies him for this title and do you yourself consider yourself a feminist?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I think the thing that qualified him for that title, well, number one, he has the most generous maternity leave scheme on the table in politics in Australia today. Now, that didn’t go down so well with the audience. It was much more popular on the panel but... (Ackerman interrupts Pyne)

PIERS AKERMAN: Absolutely.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The truth is Labor has a maternity scheme. Tony Abbott's is much more generous. Now, a person who doesn't believe that women should be in the workforce, if that's what the suggestion has been made, would not surely then have the most generous maternity leave scheme that supports women being in the workforce and returning to the workforce at the level at which they left it and then hopefully come back to it. So I think that's item number one. Number two, I was his parliamentary secretary for three years in the Howard Government. He made significant changes... (Jones interrupts Pyne)

TONY JONES: Did he identify himself to you as a feminist at that time?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, this isn’t the committee of public safety.

LINDSAY TANNER: Yes, but he swore him to secrecy though. (Tanner interjects Pyne)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The truth is as Health Minister he made changes in obstetrics and gynaecology, for example, which were heralded by the Royal College of Obstetrics and gynaecology as the most significant change that any government had made to help women. This government has dismantled those. So let's talk about the things that have actually happen rather than the things that are talked about in politics generally. So there are two examples.

KATE ELLIS: What about RU 486?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: You can go back to the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology if you want to and you can talk about other issues if you wish to but you asked me for some examples. They're some examples which prove that Tony Abbott puts his money where his mouth is. He doesn't just talk the talk in order to get the audience on side but actually walks the walk.

TONY JONES: Kate Ellis?

KATE ELLIS: Well, I just think if you want to talk about his record and if you want to talk about his record as Health Minister, I think we should talk about his record over a number of decades. But if you want to talk about when he was Health Minister, why don’t you talk about the way he restricted access to RU 486 for Australian women across the country because his religious views did not agree with that. Let's talk about that because is his record... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: No, he restricted it... (Not counting interruption from Ellis as Pyne is in the process of interrupting her)

KATE ELLIS: That is his record and he had to be overruled by the parliament when we voted in a conscience vote because, as Health Minister, he refused to do it.
CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Actually the Department of Health's advice, Kate, because I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Health at the time with responsibility for the Therapeutic Goods Administration, was that RU 486 was and is a dangerous drug and the recommendation is it should not be approved for use in Australia.

KATE ELLIS: Well...

TONY JONES: Okay, we've got another question from the audience. I'll just go to that gentleman with his hand up there. Go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, Kate, I'm sorry but feminism isn't about furnishing women with as many abortifacients as they can possibly get access to. That is not the definition of feminism and you're almost perverting the very idea of feminism, which has been upheld by success Liberal Party governments, which has been upheld by Tony Abbott as Health Minister and you're picking one - these particular examples, which have no bearing on whether women are actually equal members of society at all. Tony Abbott has never done anything more than protect women as equal members of society.

(AUDIENCE MEMBERS GROAN)

TONY JONES: I won't have people booing other audience members if you don't mind. We've got a question down the front as well.

KATE ELLIS: Can I just say that... [Jones interrupts Ellis]

TONY JONES: We'll take that as a comment. We'll come to this one.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'd like to respectfully disagree with the comments that that man just made. I mean, if you look at feminism historically starting with the suffragette movement, feminism was a lot about women trying to get equal parity with men and one of the issues that Tony Abbott - one of the issues that comes up is abortion and the right for women to control their own bodies. And while I don't like the idea that, for example, if my sister has, you know, has had a traumatic experience and wants to get - and basically she has, you know, cancer and she needs chemotherapy and one of the events that might happen is an abortion that she won't be able to do that, that she doesn't have control of her own body. So my question is if Tony Abbott is truly all about promoting women's rights, shouldn't he at least consider - put aside his religious views like Malcolm Turnbull and consider this...

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Tony Abbott hasn't said he's going to abolish abortion.

TONY JONES: Well, Christopher Pyne can answer that.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I mean we're getting a little bit ahead of ourselves here. Tony Abbott has made it so clear that even David Marr had to write about it in his essay that Tony Abbott has said he has no intention of going anywhere near the abortion laws in Australia which, by the way, are State based laws anyway and he's running for Prime Minister of Australia, not Premier of a State.

TONY JONES: Okay. Let's move along. We'll go to other subjects. You're watching Q&A. The next question comes from Jessie Huynh.

TEACHING AND PERFORMANCE00:33:45
JESSIE HUYNH: My question is for Nilaja.

NILAJA SUN: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Oh, good. [Pyne interrupts Sun]

JESSIE HUYNH: What challenges did you face to cause change to your career path from being a teacher to a solo writer and performer? Also, was the transition from having a group of students to educate and feed from them to enhance your abilities as a teacher to having a barrier between you and your audience difficult to adapt to?

NILAJA SUN: Those are great questions and you said my name so beautifully, thank you. It is not an easy name to say. Well, I will say this: I started out as an actress - so I started out as an actress and I created solo work and as I was an actor in New York City, I was bartending and I was a circus clown for children's parties. Not really a circus clown. More at children's party. And I also waited tables and I always remember the day that I waited on this man and he wanted a steak black and blue and I don't know if you know what black and blue means. It basically means black charred on the outside and blue, completely raw on the inside and as he was digging into this steak and the blood was oozing out of his mouth, I was like, I want to serve people. You know, I don't want to serve people food. I want to serve people. So what else can I do to make money and supplement my career? And so I said, “What is this new kind of career that everyone is talking about, being a teaching artist?” And what a teaching artist is is basically it's an artist who goes into a school generally that's arts poor, perhaps it's an inner city school, where kids are kind of left behind in a way. Like no child left behind. Those are the kind of schools I work in and my first class, I was like, oh, my goodness. These kids really need me. I don't know why I was like they need so much art. They need art. They need passion and they need to, I guess...

TONY JONES: Nilaja, very few people, unless they’ve actually done it, know what’s like to stand in front of a classroom of rowdy teenagers.

NILAJA SUN: Oh, yeah.

TONY JONES: You end up in tears.

NILAJA SUN: But you know what, I don't think of them as rowdy. I just think imagine a child who is five years old, maybe six years old and he wants his attention from mum, wants attention from dad who is not there, wants attention from the world and the world is not giving it to him. And then that child grows up, six, seven, eight and imagine how much angrier and angrier he gets, right? And so now the world sees him as this - almost like this animal and then I come along and all I see is the beauty that is him. So, in fact, going from acting, which is - it's a great gig. Let me tell you. It's fabulous. And then you can - and people laugh at your jokes and la, la, la, la, la. But then going from that to teaching and truly serving people, now this is the career that has truly saved my life. It is not my acting, it’s my teaching, and they inform each other.

TONY JONES: Your play is called No Child.

NILAJA SUN: Yes.

TONY JONES: You actually mention, “No child left behind.” That was an act of the congress.

NILAJA SUN: The Bush Administration.
TONY JONES: Exactly. What is the point of the title of the play?

NILAJA SUN: Well, it’s more like a sexy title. I wanted to make sure that when people walked into the show they knew that they were watching a piece about education and about teachers because that’s one of the reasons I have been performing this piece for over 700 times. I love teachers. I want to make sure we highlight teachers and we show the glorious work, the miraculous work that’s being done in classrooms all over this world.

TONY JONES: There may well be a few teachers here. So while we’re talking education, let’s move onto our next question. It’s on this subject. It’s from Hassan Raza.

**IS NAPLAN GOOD FOR EDUCATION?**

HAZZAN RAZA: So can you please explain to me why Prime Minister Gillard is trying to copy America’s educational system and even though America is below Australia in overall rankings? As a high school student, I have found that tests like NAPLAN does not help me and my fellow peers at all. We memorise this information, sit the test and then forget them all. Is that what education should be about?

TONY JONES: Okay, I’m going to start with Nilaja here because this testing system really did start in the United States.

NILAJA SUN: Right. It sure did. I’m so sorry. Don’t kick me out of your country. I love you. Yeah. Right. Right. Right. That’s one of the reasons why I wrote the play. It’s because the No Child Left Behind Act was kind of like the pink elephant in the room with teachers. Everyone kind of really didn’t like it and one of the biggest reasons why is because teachers felt that they had to teach tests. They had to teach kids how to pass a test. They weren’t teaching history. Weren’t teaching English. Weren’t teaching science. It was just how to pass that test and then what happens afterwards, just like you said, it goes in one ear and out and then you’re a college kid, you’re at graduate school and you’re like what did I learn all my life? I don’t know. Really, I don’t know. And so, yeah, I don’t know how it happened. Perhaps one of the panellist can... (Jones interrupts Sun)

TONY JONES: Well, we’ve got a government minister here. So let’s ask Kate Ellis?

KATE ELLIS: Well, I just think we need to be clear that - well, first of all I just wanted to say that I love your passion for teaching and I loved hearing about the work you’re doing. My mother is a primary school teacher still and she’s watching tonight. So thank you, mum. But I think we need to be really clear that our education system here is very different to the US model that we’re talking about and we’re not talking about the same program. In fact, we had the chance to learn a lot from US experiences and I think that what we need to be very clear upon is that NAPLAN is a tiny part of our educational reforms and NAPLAN is not a test just for the sake of a test. It’s a test for the sake of... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: We introduced the NAPLAN test.

KATE ELLIS: ...making sure that parents have information, which I believe parents are entitled to but more so that we know where to put resources and where to invest in lifting people up because we want to make sure that no matter what school you’re enrolled in in Australia it’s a great school.

PIERS AKERMAN: Is that why you’ve got the shade cloths? (Akerman interjects Ellis)

KATE ELLIS: Well, is that why we invested in school facilities in every single school across the
PIERS AKERMAN: Shade cloths?

KATE ELLIS: Yes, because we believe infrastructure... *(Akerman interrupts Ellis)*

PIERS AKERMAN: Yeah.

KATE ELLIS: Well, you can mock it all you like... *(Akerman interrupts Ellis)*

PIERS AKERMAN: Not the teachers. Not the teachers.

KATE ELLIS: Well, I'd like to know if there is a single school in Christopher's electorate that the BER project hasn't been welcomed and hasn't been well utilised and well needed.

TONY JONES: Okay. We're not going to talk about the Building the Education Revolution now. We're talking about... *(Tanner interrupts Jones)*

LINDSAY TANNER: I was just about to fire up, Tony.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I'll answer that question. So is Lindsay.

TONY JONES: Since you were partly for it, you can.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I'd love to talk about waste.

TONY JONES: But can we...

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS TALK AT ONCE

TONY JONES: The question was about testing and the testing regime and I would like you to address that first, Christopher Pyne. Are you going to keep the NAPLAN testing regime if you're in Government?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I think it's a very good question. The problem with the NAPLAN testing is not the idea of testing students for the purposes of a diagnostic tool for teachers or principals to use to decide, you know, where children are going well, where they're going poorly, where to put an emphasis. The problem with the NAPLAN testing is the publication of the results on the net and the creation of leaked tables and the pressure that the publication places on teachers, principals, school systems and so on. My view is that when the NAPLAN wasn't being published, and I have four children, three of whom are at school and last year they did the NAPLAN tests because they were in year 3 and year 5, two of my students my children didn't even know the NAPLAN was coming 'til the day it was done. The other one said that he'd known all about the NAPLAN for months because Mr Whatever-His-Name had been teaching to the test. So that was very interesting as hopefully a future Minister for Education, should we be fortunate to be elected. The publication of the NAPLAN puts the pressure on the teachers to teach to the test. Before it was just a diagnostic tool *(Jones by his own admission interrupts Pyne)*

TESTING AND CHEATING 00:41:35

TONY JONES: Can I just interrupt you? I'll let you respond to this. There's a tweet that's just come in from Asme Fahmi: American system also leads to systematic cheating by the teachers themselves. Is
that true? And I suppose it's probably best to ask you about that.

NILAJA SUN: Yeah. Well, when you're told - when you're - hmm. When you're told your school will get funding if a certain amount of your kids pass the test, and maybe 98% of your kids just got to this country like two years ago, you kind of are like, oh, God, how do we get this? How do we get this? And so I think that's probably how cheating happens. Unfortunately it is so unfortunate.

TONY JONES: Kate Ellis, we have heard a few examples of this going on in Australia as well.

KATE ELLIS: But I think what we're talking about is two very different things.

NILAJA SUN: I'm sure it is.

KATE ELLIS: We're comparing apples and oranges.

TONY JONES: Because the funding is reliant entirely - well, not entirely but the extra funding is relied on the testing system in the States. Is it the same here or not?

KATE ELLIS: Well, no.

NILAJA SUN: No, actually, yeah, we have... (Ellis interrupts Sun)

KATE ELLIS: You're talking about funding if people pass the test. (Indistinct)

NILAJA SUN: We're also talking about something about five years ago. We have a race to the top now with Obama and it's much different. It's more of a multifaceted scoring system.

KATE ELLIS: Yeah. And I think it's entirely in how you use that information. You have to use that information in a way... (Tanner interrupts Ellis)

LINDSAY TANNER: Yeah, that's the key point.

KATE ELLIS: ...that lifts up disadvantaged communities and that's how we've structured the program here in Australia.

TONY JONES: Okay. I'm going to go to another question on education. This one is from Melissa Deprez.

EDUCATION BONUS 00:43:02

MELISSA DEPREZ: If education is a major factor in breaking the poverty cycle, as recently seen on Four Corners' Australia's Poor program, why doesn't the government redirect the baby bonus to an education bonus for families whose children graduate from high school to encourage completion of their education?

TONY JONES: Lindsay Tanner do you want to answer that? I mean you can take it more broadly if you like.

LINDSAY TANNER: Well, I think the first thing is that it's wrong to look at two distinct things and tie them together. You should the proposition you're advancing should be dealt with on its merits and not connected to some other thing and made an either or. So the question of how the baby bonus might alternatively be used, I think, is not a good way of looking at it. It's better off just to say, well, is there
some merit in using, in effect, reward structures for the parents of kids who are finishing school? To me there is one really obvious reason why that’s not a good idea and that is that 90% of what you are doing would be rewarding people for doing what would have happened anyway without the reward. That’s a really inefficient use of public money. This whole area of policy is incredibly complex and fraught and you’ve got everything from performance pay for teachers, the NAPLAN testing, funding issues about equity. All these things are very, very complex and you have to be careful not to go for what are ultimately relatively simplistic kinds of options and I think this is too simplistic.

TONY JONES: Can we pull out one of - Lindsay Tanner, can we pull out one of those issues in equity because that’s what the Four Corners program revealed, was a shocking level of inequity in some of our poorest suburbs, in the sort of education opportunities for children. The Gonski Review is attempting to deal with this issue. It requires $6 billion a year of extra funding. If you were Finance Minister now, would you find that money?

LINDSAY TANNER: I wish I had the power to find that kind of money. I would have made a lot of my colleagues very happy. But unfortunately it’s not quite that simple but I think there is a wider point which, my understanding of the Gonski Report, is very much at the core of the report. There’s been a fallacy in debate about education in this country for decades, which is that there is a finite pile of money that has got schools written on it and it doesn't matter what you do, that amount of money is not going to change and the real question is how much of it goes to this kind of schools as opposed to that kind of schools when, in truth, the real issue for this country is that we need to dedicate more resources, more effort to education generally and to put behind us those long standing battles about the distribution of the cake and, to me, that's the good thing about the Gonski report is it seems to do that. The real challenge for us - we're are a very wealthy society. We spend a lot of money as a society on rubbish. Schools matter. Education matters. We need to lift our game and the questions of carving up the cake, they’re relevant. They’re important but they’re secondary questions. Yes, the focus has got to be primarily on people who are at the greatest disadvantage and need the greatest assistance, but it is not a case where we have to take from other schools to solve those problems.

TONY JONES: So let me briefly as you this, because, well, Gonski says you to have find extra money.

LINDSAY TANNER: Yes.

TONY JONES: And vast amounts of extra money, $6 billion plus per year. Do you think the current obsession with getting a surplus at all costs is going to jeopardise that?

LINDSAY TANNER: It'll make it difficult. There is no question about that. But the reason why it’s important to have that commitment and the reason why it was important that Kevin Rudd, Wayne Swan, Julia Gillard and I made that commitment when we were launching the stimulus package in January 2009 was that without that kind of discipline, you end up like Europe. You end up like the United States. So it is fundamental, however painful it can be, however much it forces you into difficult choices, if you always put off until tomorrow being disciplined, being restrained, then you end up with excessive debt and you end up in a very fragile position and ultimately you end up with the kind of problems that you’ve seen in the developed world all around the planet so... [Pyne interrupts Tanner]

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Which is what David Murray said on The 7.30 Report was happening in Australia right now.

LINDSAY TANNER: Well, I don't agree with David on that point. There are always going to be choices. The question of the $6 billion per annum, how you get there, over what period of time, what alternative uses of money are available, that's much more complex than just saying "Well, okay, it's
surplus or more money for schools."

TONY JONES: I’ve got a few hands up down in the front here.

LINDSAY TANNER: It’s much more complex.

TONY JONES: I want to come to Kate Ellis first. You’ve heard the question. The Four Corners program was referred to, the Gonski report requires vast sums of money. There was one policy alternative suggested there. Do you want to respond to that first?

KATE ELLIS: Well, I actually agree with Lindsay’s point around getting to the baby bonus and education and putting them together. I don’t think that doesn’t make sense but when we look at your question about should we be finding more resources for education? I think absolutely. Should we be investing in the best way to transform peoples’ lives to ensure that they have greater opportunities than their parents and grandparents? Absolutely. And that’s why we have committed to taking real action and bringing on board real reform and it’s why we’ve already... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, what reform? What money?

KATE ELLIS: It’s why we’ve already doubled funding to schools in Australia and have committed to looking at the next steps and to Gonski and finding the way forward.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, they’re all motherhood statements. How much money are you going to put into education in the next four years of the quadrennium funding?

KATE ELLIS: Well, you’re going to see that in... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: That’s all - I could say all the things you just said too.

KATE ELLIS: But do you know what... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: But people want to know what you’re actually going to do. I mean you’ve got this announcement about the Gonski reforms, which is all feathers and no meat. It’s a perfectly reasonable question. My answer to that question would be it’s very easy to talk about how more money fixes every problem. One of the major issues in education is not whether there’s enough money but whether we have the quality teachers that we need and how to support quality teaching. How to give them the training and professional development they need. Principal autonomy. A robust curriculum. Ending the discrimination against disabled children in the school system. I mean there’s a whole range of issues.

TONY JONES: Okay.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: And motherhood statements just doesn’t cut it. (Pyne interrupts Jones)

TONY JONES: All right. We’ve got a whole range of people with... (Ellis interrupts Jones)

KATE ELLIS: Well, you didn’t give me any policies there, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The Coalition is committed... (Jones interrupts Pyne)

TONY JONES: We’ve got a few... (Pyne interrupts Jones)
CHRISTOPHER PYNE: ...to $6.5 billion dollars of new spending over the next quadrennium, which is the current quantum of funds plus 6% indexation. That’s a commitment on the table.

KATE ELLIS: Plus the ones that you’re pulling out. [Ellis interrupts Jones]

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: That’s a commitment on the table.

KATE ELLIS: The $425 million you’re pulling out of the national partnerships, the trades training centres you’re pulling out.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, you said I didn’t make any promises. I just told you exactly what our commitment is.

TONY JONES: Sorry, can you just repeat the promise?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: You can’t have your cake and eat it too.

TONY JONES: Just repeat the promise.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: It’s lovely to have your cake and eat it too.

TONY JONES: Just repeat the promise.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: We have said that we will fund schools in the next quadrennium at the current quantum of funding plus 6% indexation over the - which is the average over the forward estimates, which equates to six and a half... [Tanner interrupts Pyne]

LINDSAY TANNER: That’s the status quo.

KATE ELLIS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Which equates to six... [Tanner interrupts Pyne]

LINDSAY TANNER: That’s basically status quo.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: But the government isn’t committed to it, Lindsay.

LINDSAY TANNER: That’s basically... [Ellis interrupts Tanner]

KATE ELLIS: No, we’re committed to... [Pyne interrupts Ellis]

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: The government hasn’t committed to it.

KATE ELLIS: We are committed to... [Pyne interrupts Ellis]

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: You are not.

KATE ELLIS: ...improving the system. You are committing here to keeping things exactly the same.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: What about some real money on the table.

KATE ELLIS: Which is exactly what we’re going to do. You put nothing on the table.
MULTIPLE SPEAKERS TALK AT ONCE

TONY JONES: What about we hear some questions from the audience. We've got a young lady there with her hand up. Go ahead.

CHILD CARE CRISIS

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I've heard a lot of you on the panel talking about education and how you plan to improve it but the thing is we need to start at the foundation level. We need to start in early childhood education and care and the Big Steps Campaign looks at that, at funding professional wages to keep professionals, to keep quality educators in early childhood. My question is for you, Kate Ellis. How do you plan to stop the crisis of 180 early childhood educators leaving every week?

KATE ELLIS: Well, thank you for your question. I know there is lots of Big Steppers right around Australia that will be very pleased that you got to ask that question. But more so, first of all, it's by valuing the staff in early childhood right across Australia. Now, I'm really proud that we've seen a huge expansion in the early childhood sector. We've seen an extra 9% of Australian children in early childhood services this year, which means that we have more services, we need more staff and we're also lifting the quality at the same time. Now, that means that we need to find a way that we can make sure that child care remains affordable and that's something that our Government has been incredibly committed to, tripling the expenditure in the area, but we also need to make sure that we're valuing our staff, which is where the balancing act comes in. Now, the Coalition and the Federal Opposition have made it very clear that they don't think they have a role to play there.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: You were asked about the government's policy.

KATE ELLIS: Yeah, I'm getting there. I'm getting there, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: This isn't question time, Kate.

TONY JONES: The questioner just asked about a remarkable number of people leaving this area because their pay is not high enough to actually sustain doing the work. They're not surviving.

KATE ELLIS: I heard the question.

TONY JONES: Do you agree with that, that they're not surviving on the wage they're being given?

KATE ELLIS: Well, if I could finish... (Jones interrupts Ellis)

TONY JONES: That's why so many are leaving.

KATE ELLIS: If I could finish the one sentence I was in the middle of when I was interrupted there.

PIERS AKERMAN: A very long sentence. (Akerman interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Wasn't it. (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

KATE ELLIS: I was actually saying that we have... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: We're running out of time.
KATE ELLIS: ...we have more staff working in the sector than we've ever had before. We have a huge expansion as a result of the fact that our Government has massively increased affordability assistance to families, meaning there's more children. But, of course, we've said that we need to keep working with the sector on what the next steps are. We're not prepared to wipe our hands of them. We know that that means that we need to find a way to keep staff and to keep fees affordable because we know how important it is and we know that it actually changes children's' lives. Now, am I going to pull out a cheque book on Q&A here tonight? No, obviously... *(Tanner interrupts Ellis)*

LINDSAY TANNER: I hope not.

KATE ELLIS: Yeah, thanks. No, obviously I'm not.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: I thought you promised them $1.4 billion.

KATE ELLIS: No, that is what you party said in question time that we promised. There was no such commitment.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, it was in the newspaper.

PIERS AKERMAN: Kate, I think you should talk to the very capable Mrs Abbott, because she is an early childhood specialist...

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: That's right. *(Indistinct)*

KATE ELLIS: Well, I'm talking to an early childhood specialist right here and I'm saying thank you for the amazing work that you're doing. We value it. We know how important it is but we've got to keep child care affordable because we know that families rely on it.

TONY JONES: Okay.

PIERS AKERMAN: I think instead of rubbishing Mrs Abbott you actually should listen to what she says in this area.

KATE ELLIS: I've never rubbished Mrs Abbott but thanks for putting those words in my mouth.

PIERS AKERMAN: No. No. No. But your colleagues have.

TONY JONES: Okay. We're almost out of time. We've got time for one last question. It comes from Stewart Lung.

STEWART LUNG: Why do politicians make obvious comments about their respective political parties only after they have resigned from politics?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: That one's for you.

POST POLITICS OPINIONS

STEWART LUNG: Why aren't serving politicians making these comments?

LINDSAY TANNER: This sounds like it's for me.

TONY JONES: Lindsay Tanner?
LINDSAY TANNER: Well, okay. First, the premise of your question is totally untrue. I have been engaged in these debates for many years.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: That's true.

LINDSAY TANNER: As even Christopher has just backed me up on.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: No, he has. I've read articles he used to write years ago about that.

LINDSAY TANNER: Thank you Christopher. Secondly, there is a wider global phenomenon going on here that the Labor Party needs to front up to. We are seeing traditionally strong social democratic and Labor parties that have been used to getting routinely 40% plus of the votes suddenly getting 23%, 25%. We've seen disasters for Labor in Queensland and New South Wales, polling often into the twenties federally. All of these things are part of a wider global phenomenon and a big change in how Labor goes about its business that's nothing to do with the current government or Kevin Rudd or Julia Gillard but is a long-term structural shift that really worries me. When I first joined Labor in the '70s it was too much dominated by belief. To some degree almost elements of zealotry and passion and the views of the electorate were kind of like an inconvenient sort of nuisance that you had to look at occasionally. Bob Hawke's great achievement was to get the Labor Party to look at issues on their merits and gradually the emphasis shifted. But what's happened subsequently and this is not about this government of Federal politics but just about the whole situation, the emphasis has moved more and more to short term responses to electoral pressures and a decline in significance of belief and commitment. We have lost roughly 100 Lower House members in the past few years across State and Federal jurisdictions. We have seen Labor go from majority to minority position, in some cases holding onto Government in every jurisdiction in the country except South Australia over the past few years. We have seen devastation in the two states that gave birth to the Labor Party. If this is not a situation where Labor needs to take a good hard look at what it's about, not just think about the next election... (Akerman interrupts Tanner)

PIERS AKERMAN: Absolutely, yeah.

LINDSAY TANNER: ...if this is not a situation that requires that, I do not know what is.

TONY JONES: Can I just interrupt though? You blame cynical manipulators who are obsessed with polling data, essentially, for this whole parlous state of affairs.

LINDSAY TANNER: That's part of the picture. I don't solely blame that.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: It's a good summary though. (Pyne interjects Tanner)

TONY JONES: That is... (Tanner interrupts Jones)

LINDSAY TANNER: No. No. It's part of the picture.

TONY JONES: That's is pretty much one of the key things (indistinct)... (Akerman interrupts Jones)

PIERS AKERMAN: Well, Tony... (Akerman interrupts Jones)

TONY JONES: So is that something you complained about, just to go back to the questioner’s question - is that something you complained about when you were in cabinet?
LINDSAY TANNER: I argued the point about issues and on certain issues I made a very strong point that what mattered most was having some rigour, some robustness to the policy position that we were going to be arguing out there in the general public. When I joined the Labor Party - in many more recent times, people joined Labor to change the world. Now they join Labor to run the world. There's a very big difference and I think that we need to get more of that passion and commitment and it's not just about Australian Labor. New Zealand has got the same problem. The Social Democrats in Germany have got it. The Social Democrats in Sweden have got it. The Labour Party in Britain has got it. It is about structural change in our society and it is a problem for not just the Labor Party but for our political system and the strength of our democracy. We need a mainstream left of centre party that is driven by belief and we haven't been driven enough by belief in the last ten or 15 years.

TONY JONES: Okay. All right. We're running out of time. I will quickly hear from the panel on this. Christopher Pyne?

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Well, since we're so short of time, can I just support Lindsay and the claim that he's made that he's been saying this for years. Because when I was a very young Young Liberal collecting clippings of newspaper articles, I collected one of his clippings where he was saying just this very same thing in about 1986. So he's not a Johnny-come-lately.

LINDSAY TANNER: (Indistinct)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: It was. It was. I can tell you.

TONY JONES: Christopher, let's personalise it. What is going to be in your book after you leave? Do you want to tell us now?

LINDSAY TANNER: Oh, yes.

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Oh, goodness gracious. I'm never leaving.

TONY JONES: Okay, yes.

PIERS AKERMAN: Well, Tony, I'm really surprised. Here we have a week - you've dwelt a lot with your namesake but we've heard nothing about the former national President of the ALP who is facing a number of very serious charges of corruption. We've heard nothing about the... (Pyne interrupts Akerman)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Speaker. (Pyne interrupts Akerman)

PIERS AKERMAN: ...Gillard's hand-chosen Speaker, who's made the most extraordinary remarks about women.

TONY JONES: But I'm going to just interrupt you there because that's not what the questioner asked and I will bring you back to the question.

PIERS AKERMAN: No. No. But we're talking about where politics is today and I think the media and this show has a lot... (Not an interruption as Akerman in process of interrupting Jones)

TONY JONES: Well, we're talking - I'm sorry to tell you we're talking about responding to questions that are coming from the audience and we have done so until now.

PIERS AKERMAN: Well, this is about politics. This is about politics...
TONY JONES: Okay. Let’s see if Kate Ellis... (Ackerman interrupts Jones)

PIERS AKERMAN: ...and you haven't addressed it.

TONY JONES: Let's see if Kate Ellis wants to talk about the questions from the audience.

KATE ELLIS: Well, I absolutely would. (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Why haven’t we talked about the speaker.

KATE ELLIS: And I’d just say that I don’t share Lindsay's diagnosis at all and I think that if there is a criticism of this Government, it cannot be short-term policy making. When you have look at real policies to increase... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: What about the emissions trading scheme that was axed and brought back?

KATE ELLIS: ...to increase superannuation from 9 to 12%; to increase the retirement age; to bring in a price on carbon... (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: What about reopening Nauru?

KATE ELLIS: ...to build a National Broadband Network, none of these are in place... (Ackerman interrupts Ellis)

PIERS AKERMAN: East Timor.

KATE ELLIS: ...by the next election. (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: Citizens’ assembly.

KATE ELLIS: This is about building our country for the challenges of the future. (Ackerman interrupts Ellis)

PIERS AKERMAN: Price watch.

KATE ELLIS: This is because we... (Akerman interrupts Ellis)

PIERS AKERMAN: Grocery watch.

KATE ELLIS: ...absolutely have a purpose...

CHRISTOPHER PYNE: This list is endless. (Pyne interrupts Ellis)

KATE ELLIS: ...and we’re very clear about it...

PIERS AKERMAN: Pink batts. (Ackerman interrupts Ellis)

TONY JONES: Okay. All right.

KATE ELLIS: ...and despite these interruptions, are going to remain absolutely focused on it.
(AUDIENCE CHEERS)

TONY JONES: Let's go for a final comment from our observer.

NILAJA SUN: Having just finished reading a book by the beautiful Republican no longer in office, Arnold Schwarzenegger, one of his biggest life lessons "Don't over-think."

TONY JONES: I thought it was going to be, "Don't sleep with the maid." That's all we have time for. Please thank our panel: Lindsay Tanner, Christopher Pyne, Nilaja Sun, Kate Ellis and Piers Akerman. Okay. Next week on Q&A: comedian author and psychotherapist Pamela Stephenson; the Minister for Workplace Relations Bill Shorten; the project presenter and Gen X team leader Charlie Pickering; the Shadow Minister for Industry Sophie Mirabella; and the editor of the IPA Review James Paterson. Until next week’s Q&A, goodnight.

Table of Interruptions

PE = Pyne interrupts Ellis; JS = Jones interrupts Sun; P A/M = Pyne interrupts audience member, TJ = Tanner interrupts Jones, etc.