

U-turn by Labor on childcare rebate

EXCLUSIVE
PATRICIA KARVELAS

LABOR and the Greens will combine in the Senate today to block the Abbott government's proposed freeze on the indexation of the \$7500 childcare rebate, despite Labor first proposing the freeze in its last budget.

Labor childcare spokeswoman Kate Ellis told *The Australian* Labor would work with the Greens to block the freeze because the government was hurting childcare workers by asking them to return wage rises awarded by Labor.

"We have no intention of sitting by, supporting this government cut the wages of childcare workers and then also cut the assistance of Australian parents," she said.

'We have no intention of sitting by, supporting this government cut the wages of childcare workers'

KATE ELLIS
LABOR CHILD CARE
SPOKESWOMAN

"This freeze in indexation was only ever proposed to help pay for childcare workers' immediate wage increases so that parents don't have to foot the bill. This government wants to cut and then just cut some more."

Indexation on the \$7500 childcare rebate cap has been frozen since 2011, for an initial period of four years.

The amendments before the Senate this week would have implemented the decision of the last federal budget to freeze indexation until 2017, saving \$105.8 million over three years.

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said the Greens would block freezing the childcare rebate because it would hit 150,000 Australian families hard. "By combining the freeze with a range of other legislation in one bill, the government is hoping to rush it through the Senate," Senator Hanson-Young said.

"Amending the bill to stop the freeze will help families around

the country to meet the skyrocketing cost of childcare."

The Greens will also seek to establish a Senate inquiry into the childcare sector, to report back by June next year.

The move follows the government's decision to jettison the remainder of Labor's \$300m fund to lift wages for childcare workers, which the Coalition said had been used to provide wage increase for workers on collective agreements and act as a means of boosting union membership.

Childcare Minister Sussan Ley this week called on some providers to give back some of the money earmarked for staff. The government would put the money into a national pool for professional development.

The Australian has also obtained a letter sent to Tony Abbott by nine childcare centre managers who are refusing to return the money handed to them to provide pay rises for their staff.

In the letter they say they applied for the money in good faith. "We have entered into enterprise agreements with our staff members, which obligate us to pass on the funds contracted to us through the Early Years Quality Fund to their wages. Our educators deserve to be paid more. That is the very reason for which we applied for the funding in the first place. As well as our obligation to pass on this funding, we will be doing so because we respect the work our staff members do educating the next generation of young Australians."

In a submission, obtained by *The Australian*, by the nation's largest childcare provider, Goodstart Early Learning, the group makes the case that the freeze must not go through because it would hurt families.

"The \$7500 cap is a blunt and poorly designed policy," Goodstart told the Senate.

"The cap rations access to Child Care Assistance not on the financial or personal circumstances of the family but on the amount of early learning and care that the family needs. The application of the \$7500 cap has the result that if a child is booked into care for five days a week over a full year, the government effectively provides no assistance for the fifth day. The family, unless they are eligible for Child Care Benefit, has to fund 100 per cent of the cost of the fifth day."

Indigenous dancers find their groove



SAM MOOY

Director Raymond Blanco with sisters Taree and Caleena Sansbury, who are graduating from NAISDA's four-year diploma of professional dance performance

JUSTIN BURKE

FOR Raymond Blanco, returning two years ago to the indigenous dance college NAISDA was like coming home.

One of the first graduates in 1984, Blanco went on to become artistic director at the school's Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre for 10 years but left a decade ago.

"It was a rocky time," Blanco said of the period, which saw growing debt, mass sackings, lockouts and other factional disputes threaten the organisation's future.

"But so many of us have come back now that it's on solid ground and we are moving forward faster and faster."

Blanco is overseeing *Our Home* — *Ngalpun Mudth*, the school's end-of-year show, which premiered last night at Sydney's Carriageworks. The show runs until Saturday, when a new foundation will be launched by chairman Warren Mundine under the patronage of NSW Governor Marie Bashir, seeking \$10 million in donations to support the school's development program.

Seven years ago, the school moved from its various locations across Sydney to a single site at Mount Penang, outside Gosford on the NSW central coast. The first stages of the development plan have included a new studio and administration complex and an upgrade to the six residential cottages.

"When I came back two years ago, admissions were about 20; last year we took in 25; and next year we're taking another 25 or 30. It is growing and growing every year," Blanco said.

Despite the rising enrolments,

attrition rates remain high. Sisters Taree and Caleena Sansbury from Port Adelaide are graduating from the four-year diploma of professional dance performance, but are the only remaining students from the 20 who began in their cohort.

"We have found over the last seven years the most important thing for keeping our students engaged is holistic care. We want to provide more on-site boarding in a culturally supportive way," said Kim Walker, a graduate from the 1980s who is now executive director and head of dance.

NAISDA's Mount Penang property backs on to the Baxter Juvenile Justice Centre.

"We joke about it all the time, but it is also quite a serious thing because of the outrageous rate of incarcerated young Aboriginal men and women in this country. We think having a culturally supportive place nearby is really appropriate," Walker said.

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New greenhouse gas the worst

SCIENTISTS have discovered a greenhouse gas with unprecedented potential to warm the earth, and say the chemical has been lurking in the atmosphere for decades.

The substance — perfluorotributylamine (PFTBA) — "is the most radiatively efficient chemical found to date, breaking all other chemical records for its potential to impact climate", scientists at the University of Toronto said yesterday.

The man-made chemical has been used in electrical equipment since the mid-20th century, and is used for electronic testing and as a heat-transfer agent.

It has only now been determined to affect climate, and according to the University of Toronto chemists, there are no known processes for destroying or removing it from the lower atmosphere.

"So it has a very long lifetime, possibly hundreds of years," researcher Cora Young said.

"Calculated over a 100-year timeframe, a single molecule of PFTBA has the equivalent climate impact as 7100 molecules of CO₂," added her colleague Angela Hong.

The findings were published in the online edition of *Geophysical Research Letters*.

AFP

Gillard's foul-mouthed flack exposed

LAUREN WILSON

JULIA Gillard's outspoken former communications director John McTernan has been exposed using highly offensive language to describe journalists and political staff in a series of leaked emails.

The British media strategist, who ran the former prime minister's communications department from September 2011 until June this year, was well-known for his combative approach in dealing with journalists.

But thousands of emails sent by Mr McTernan — who was frequently likened to political head-kicker Malcolm Tucker from the BBC satire *The Thick of It* — are set to provide fresh evidence of his aggressive approach overseeing the media strategy of Ms Gillard's office, and raise questions about the appropriateness of his professional communications.



John McTernan

In one email in a batch obtained by the ABC, Mr McTernan responds to a query from former attorney-general Nicola Roxon's office seeking contact details for *The Australian's* Troy Bramston and another reporter from Fairfax Media.

He provides an email address for Bramston under the words "the c . . . t".

The email was sent a day after Bramston wrote a column, published in this newspaper in March, declaring that Ms Gillard's latest ministerial reshuffle indicated the depth of talent within Labor ranks, below the cabinet level, was lacklustre.

The leaked emails also show Mr McTernan, who previously worked for Tony Blair and was in Australia on a 457 visa, had a habit of denying information to journalists who published material he did not agree with or was angered by. One email, titled "Simon Cullen", instructs the prime minister's media unit to block the ABC's political reporter's access to information and describes him as being "dead".

"Gets nothing. Ever. No alerts. No transcripts. No returned calls. Nothing. Ever. Not a whim. Dead. An order. Feel free to forward to him."

In another, Mr McTernan says of *The Australian's* Capital Circle columnist Ben Packham: "Packham is in the deep freeze after his efforts in CC this morning."

Mr McTernan announced after Labor's election loss that he was quitting politics and returning to journalism. He could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The Australian understands that the ABC will tomorrow report that the day after Ms Gillard's controversial speech at a Women for Gillard event in June, which criticised "men in blue ties", Mr McTernan sent an email to another staffer in the Prime Minister's office questioning whether Labor was supporting a bill to restrict abortion, put up in the Senate by crossbencher John Madigan.

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