

MORRISON ON WARPATH OVER BLOCKED EXPENDITURE SAVINGS

ALP accused of rating 'dog act'

SARAH MARTIN

Scott Morrison has warned Labor against sabotaging the budget, saying it would be a "dog act" to force a downgrading of the country's AAA credit rating for its own political gain.

Accusing the opposition of a "cynical game" of budget damage by blocking the government's latest round of savings measures, the Treasurer said Labor continued to demand "higher and higher" spending with little regard for consequences.

But after threatening tax hikes to fill the funding gap left by

\$13.1 billion in so-called "zombie" savings measures blocked in the Senate, the government yesterday denied a report that it was planning to cut capital gains tax discounts to boost revenue and to address concerns about housing affordability.

Finance Minister Mathias Cormann, however, left open the possibility of raising the Medicare levy in the May budget, though that was "not what we want to do".

Mr Morrison said the government had made "crystal clear" its preference was to bring the budget back into balance by dealing with the "expenditure challenges", a position being resisted by Labor.

He said Labor was under suspicion of talking down the economy for its own benefit.

"I can understand that suspicion, but it would be a pretty dog act for those opposite to be seeking to frustrate the savings measures of this government to purely pursue their own cynical political objective of trying to force a downgrade of the AAA credit rating," the Treasurer said.

Responding to suggestions the government planned to wind back tax concessions for property investors in the budget, Malcolm Turnbull said: "We do not support the Labor Party's plans to increase capital gains tax or indeed their

plans to outlaw negative gearing."

Senator Cormann issued a stronger denial: "The government has absolutely no intention of reducing the capital gains tax discount or making changes to negative gearing."

"We want to be able to deliver lower taxes so we can strengthen growth and create more jobs but we do need to get the budget back into surplus."

However, facing an obstructive Senate that has indicated little willingness to negotiate on the government's \$5.5bn omnibus bill introduced to parliament this week, Mr Morrison has warned that tax increases are a possibility

to meet its commitments, including the underfunded National Disability Insurance Scheme, which is linked to the bill.

Independent senator Nick Xenophon has suggested an increase to the Medicare levy for high-income earners to help fill the \$7bn NDIS funding shortfall.

Asked if the government would support a small levy increase, the Prime Minister said that he would not deal with "hypotheticals", while Mr Morrison accused Senator Xenophon of refusing to deal with the "spending issues of welfare".

The omnibus savings bill winds back Family Tax Benefit pay-

ments to fund a new \$1.6bn means-tested childcare package covering up to 85 per cent of childcare costs for low-income earners.

Releasing new data on parents who had reached the "financial cliff" for childcare support, Education Minister Simon Birmingham said the government would continue to work with the Senate trying to secure savings needed to pay for the reform.

"We will keep working with every single member of the Australian Senate who is willing to talk to us to get the savings to pay for these reforms to ensure they are implemented," Senator Birmingham said.

Journos and subs never trolled Idi, Adolf and Joe

JAMES JEFFREY THE SKETCH



Burdened with the grim revelation that the fine line dividing our democracy from dictatorship is the gold travel pass, Ian Macdonald was a picture of weary sorrow.

The two halves of his tie hung slightly apart like the hands of a clock, so no matter what time it was in the Senate, it looked like half past six on Macca's shirt. Or, in other words, time to tell some harsh truths.

"When we start to run this country by what is popular (and not by what is right, I fear for the future," he said during an impassioned soliloquy against the retrospective axing of the magic gold wonder pass of unlimited free flights for retired pollies.

True, the axing does seem wildly popular, but the man who gave a transcendent cry of anguish when Tony Abbott didn't give him a portfolio stressed he felt no sense of entitlement.

"This measure is pure populism," he said with palpable distaste.

From history's murky shallows, he pulled a brace of cautionary tales of pollies who'd tried in vain to win voters' love this way before. Then he turned to the real villains.

"I now turn to the trolls of social media, the commentariat and the lazy journalists and

subeditors who knowingly falsely accused me of self-interest and of opposing this legislation for my own benefit."

Subeditors will appreciate the acknowledgment.

"I want to respond to them — not that any of them will ever print or broadcast any of this," he said. "This has nothing to do with me. It will give me no financial benefit or other benefit."

Sometimes his memory let him down. "This false criticism of me has been very loud, but when a Labor senator was proven to obtain a very personal benefit by having a Chinese company pay his own personal bills, from the same accusers there was barely a murmur."

One suspects Sam Dastyari wishes this were even remotely true.

There were intimations of mortality ("I'll probably be carried out of here in a pine box") and a lament about pollies' poor pay, which starts just shy of \$200,000. But nothing says heartfelt like a trio of tyrants: "Perhaps Hitler and Stalin or Idi Amin had the right idea: do not bother about a parliament and you do not have to bother about those pesky parliamentarians at all."

For what it's worth, Hitler covered some of his travel expenses early on his political career by charging foreign press for interviews. Stalin hated flying and would have identified with Macca's *cri de coeur* ("The last thing I want to do when I leave this place is get on an aeroplane"). And Amin? He had a soft spot for gadding about in the Mercedes given to him by Muammar Gaddafi.

None of them had to deal with social media, though.

Hanson nominee sent hate tweets as Liberal member

ANDREW BURRELL



Richard Eldridge

A candidate for Pauline Hanson's One Nation in Western Australia who attacked gays, Muslims and "ugly" black people on social media was a member of the Liberal Party at the time he made the offensive comments.

Perth real estate agent Richard Eldridge, a candidate for the upper house at next month's state election, referred to gay relationships as "poo games", described Muslims as "little sheet heads" and advocated the killing of Indonesian journalists.

In one tweet he also said: "You never here (sic) a good looking black person complain its (sic) the ugly blacks that start this nonsense Mohammed Ali was black and he loved it."

Mr Eldridge was a member of the state Liberal Party's Swan division when the Twitter comments were made in 2013.

He told *The Australian* yesterday he joined the Liberal Party in 2007 and had worked as a volunteer at every election since then, except in 2010, when he ran for Katter's Australian Party at the federal election.

The Liberals have come under fire this week for striking a preference-swap deal with One Nation that could help the protest party win the balance of power in the state's upper house.

The deal makes it more likely Mr Eldridge will be elected to the upper house, although he will struggle given that he is No 2 on the party's ticket in the South Metropolitan region.

Mr Eldridge said he believed publicity over the tweets from his since deactivated account could boost his campaign for a seat in the upper house for One Nation.

"It could help me, actually — I am getting a lot of coverage on it," he said.

He said he no longer held such views and admitted the comments were unsavoury and foolish.

"I've been smacked over the knuckles by the party, I've been counselled," he said.

The emergence of the tweets comes amid a string of controversies over One Nation candidates during the West Australian election campaign.

Ross Slater, a candidate for the seat of Murray-Wellington, once claimed that allowing same-sex marriage would lead to the legalisation of polygamy and sibling marriage, and could open the door to compulsory homosexual teachings in homes and schools.

'We did make mistakes early on in the vetting; Richard (Eldridge) was one of those early guys vetted'

COLIN TINCKNELL WA ONE NATION LEADER

were homophobic, racist or sexist.

He said while some early vetting of candidates was not done well, he was confident that since he took over as leader a few months ago, it had improved.

"Yes, we did make mistakes early on in the vetting," he said. "Richard (Eldridge) was one of those early guys vetted. But later on, the quality of our candidates — it's incredible."

Mr Tincknell said he personally supported same-sex marriage and equal rights for gay people. In his career in the mining industry, he had devoted himself to working to improve the lives of Aboriginals for the past 20 years.

He condemned Mr Eldridge's comments, noting that he was a member of the Liberal Party at the time.

"It was a bit of mucking around between mates, a bit of tongue-in-cheek stuff," he said. "He doesn't hold those views any more."

Premier Colin Barnett said Mr Eldridge's comments were "abhorrent".

"In absolutely no way do I endorse the policies or candidates of One Nation," he said. "I'm not going to be defending One Nation — go and talk to Pauline."

Howard praises 'pragmatic' deal



Former prime minister John Howard, right, on the campaign trail at Livingston Shopping Centre yesterday



ANDREW BURRELL

John Howard has defended the West Australian Liberal Party's preference deal with One Nation and accused the Greens of being the only remaining "extremist" party in Australian politics.

Campaigning in Perth late yesterday ahead of the state election, Mr Howard said he could understand the Liberal Party's move to

deliver preferences to One Nation in the upper house, even though this could give the party the balance of power. "I think it's a very sensible, pragmatic decision and I fully understand why the WA Liberal Party has taken the decision," he said.

Mr Howard has always been popular in Western Australia and Liberal strategists are hoping the former prime minister brings some star power to their campaign for next month's election.

He was greeted by scores of well-wishers as he strolled through a shopping centre in Canning Vale, in Perth's southern suburbs, which is located in the electorate of Southern River.

The seat is held by Liberal MP Peter Abetz, brother of federal Liberal senator Eric Abetz, on a margin of 10.9 per cent, but is considered vulnerable in the face of an expected swing to Labor.

At the shopping centre yesterday, Liyao Dong, 19, was excited to meet Mr Howard as she worked behind the counter at a Muffin Break outlet. "He's the only politician I've ever heard of," she said, even though she was a young child when Mr Howard was leader.

Mr Howard denied that as prime minister in 2001 he had instructed state divisions of the Liberal Party to vote One Nation last on how-to-vote cards.

"Trying to understand that

decision and decisions that were taken by various iterations of the Liberal Party 15 or 16 years ago is ridiculous," he said. "This is a different set of circumstances. I think it's entirely sensible that the party has done what it's done."

He said One Nation had changed since 2001.

"Everyone changes in 16 years," he said. "The one thing that hasn't changed is there's only one extremist party in Australian politics now and that's the Greens."

"And who's playing footie with the Greens? The Australian Labor Party. The idea that people would see that current One Nation party as more extreme than the Greens is ridiculous."

Indigenous groups laud native title changes bill

STEPHEN FITZPATRICK INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS EDITOR

Indigenous groups have welcomed amendments to the Native Title Act, despite protests from Labor that it was blindsided by the move and its timing was poor in the week that the annual Closing the Gap report was delivered.

The legislation is in response to a finding by a full bench of the Federal Court two weeks ago that a single member of a claimant group could stop an indigenous land use agreement from being registered.

That decision was in relation to the \$1.3 billion Noongar agreement in Western Australia, but it flows on to up to 150 existing agreements, including the Adani coalmine venture in Queensland.

The opposition's legal affairs spokesman, Mark Dreyfus, said Labor supported the need for a revision of the act but criticised the government's move of bringing the bill for debate only a day after introducing it to parliament.

He said indigenous and business groups should have been consulted first. "It beggars belief the government would seek to rush it on in this way," Mr Dreyfus said. "It's entirely a betrayal of the sentiment expressed in this place a couple of days ago by the Prime Minister (in his Closing the Gap speech)."

Indigenous Labor MP Linda Burney said the move was "completely disrespectful" to the spirit and intent of native title.

"What we have dealt with this week, the fine speeches from both Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, the fact that both signed the Redfern Statement (on indigenous rights), and then to end

this week with this unnecessary and unifying stupidity (is) not in the spirit of what has taken place in this house this week."

Glen Kelly, the chief executive of the National Native Title Council representing 16 land councils across Australia, said parliament should support the passage of the amendment.

"The bill reflects changes that the native title sector has been seeking for a number of years (and) reflects recommendations made in the report of the Australian Law Reform Commission in

'The bill reflects changes the native title sector has been seeking for a number of years'

GLEN KELLY NATIONAL NATIVE TITLE COUNCIL

its review of the Native Title Act," he said. "It will also secure almost 150 (Indigenous Land Use Agreements) across the country that have been invalidated by the recent court decision. These agreements see significant benefits flow to the Aboriginal community to support cultural programs and community development, as well as provide important employment and business opportunities."

Chairwoman of the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations Janine Coombs said the bill would "provide certainty to the thousands of traditional owners... who may be in the process of negotiating agreements."

The bill will go before a Senate committee for the next month.

Effort to find 2000 NDIS-eligible young people lost in aged-care limbo is faltering

EXCLUSIVE

RICK MORTON SOCIAL AFFAIRS WRITER

The mission to find about 2000 young people left languishing in aged-care homes and transfer them to the National Disability Insurance Scheme this year will fail unless "dramatic" changes are made, according to the group leading an effort to locate them.

For decades, young people with disabilities but with nowhere else to go were placed in residential aged care for the rest of their lives — and often forgotten.

Two years ago, disability housing specialist Summer Foundation funded its own project to find some of the total 6200 young people believed to be lodged in nursing homes around the country.

Initially, Summer Foundation located 32 people and the NDIS agency identified another 183.

But 31 had died already, 24 had



Carol and Kirby Littley: 'I sleep at night now'

Disability scheme 'has been a saviour for our family'

By the time she was 28, Kirby Littley had been a schoolteacher for six years, owned her apartment and was thriving independently. Then a few days after Christmas in 2014, she was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumour. She was in surgery within six hours.

When the Geelong woman woke, she couldn't move, walk or talk — she'd had a series of strokes after her surgery.

This led to setbacks that forced her to live in a nursing home for a year, a place she found "lonely" and unable to treat her unique circumstances.

Her outlook changed when she got on a trial of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which enabled her to live at her parents' house and dramatically improved her recovery.

"Things became better, I could go home," she said.

"Modifications to home were made and the equipment I needed was purchased and the carers were organised, which meant I could recover at home without the loud noises."

Ms Littley said the health team was surprised how much faster her recovery had been since she moved to her parents house. She is getting better at walking and talking and hopes to start eating soon, giving her faith that she could one day recover her independence.

"I am much happier at home, I am practising talking and walking, I am optimistic everything will fall into place," she said. "I like having the choice to do what I want when I want; I want to be independent, to have my old life back again."

Before her brain tumour, Ms Littley was teaching at a special

needs school, which she "loved". She lived alone and decorated her apartment in Geelong's south. After the tumour operation, she couldn't even swallow — needing to be fed through a tube into her stomach.

Her parents visited her twice a day in the nursing home, but it was still a lonely struggle being the only young person there.

Her mother, Carol, said the NDIS had been a saviour for the family. "I sleep at night now, I used to come home because she was really down; it was sort of like leaving someone in prison," she said.

to change dramatically." Young people in aged-care homes — who almost always have severe and complex disabilities — are not treated as being automatically eligible for the scheme.

Summer Foundation head of policy Luke Bo'sher said teenagers with disabilities in out-of-school-hours care were automatically included in the NDIS but not young people in nursing homes.

"For many people, their current disability provider has a strong incentive to sign them up to the NDIS because their funding dries up," he said. "But that is not the case in aged care, so in many cases we don't even know where these people are."

Young people in aged care, some of the most vulnerable in the country, would use about \$1.2 billion of the \$22bn NDIS and Mr Bo'sher urged that about \$15 million of that should be brought forward to plan for their transition.

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been in the homes so long they had turned 65 — and thus were no longer eligible to join NDIS — and 15 could not be found.

Since then, as the NDIS began its transition to full rollout, the location work has slowed.

"Things were a bit more flexible

in the trials but this has tightened up a lot," Summer Foundation executive manager Tom Worsnop told *The Australian*. "For example, in NSW there are no new opportunities to join the NDIS until at least July."

"There were supposed to be

2000 young people in nursing homes enter the scheme this financial year. We are already halfway through the year and I still doubt more than 50 or 60 people have entered."

The Senate released its report into the care of young people in

nursing homes in 2015, following an inquiry which heard evidence from people in their 20s and older about poor support and social isolation.

"I don't really have much to do with the other people where I live because two years ago someone I

was friends with died." James Bailey, 28, told the inquiry in a submission. "My decision then was don't befriend any of the old people because tomorrow you never know who might be dead."

More than half those young people who did make it into the

NDIS during the trial did so because the Summer Foundation went looking for them, with its own funding.

"This is not going to happen automatically," Mr Worsnop said. "To be able to achieve 2000 people this year, something needs