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SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Sidebottom, Sid, MP

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Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (5.18 pm)—Today gives me a formal opportunity to thank the many people who trusted me again to represent them and our region in the federal parliament—indeed, with a considerably increased margin. For the record, my electorate of Braddon has changed since the 2007 election and now includes the west coast of Tasmania, whilst losing the Port Sorell-Hawley area to my good friend Dick Adams, in Lyons. To the many thousands of voters who voted for me as an individual and/or as the Labor representative, I say thank you for the honour of representing you in the 43rd Parliament and, as things have transpired, also representing you in the new Labor government led by Julia Gillard, who is no stranger to Braddon, to be sure.

With the election done and dusted, we are left with a challenging and interesting period of national government ahead. Clearly, the national electorate, like my own, has spoken, and it is our individual responsibility as members of Parliament to make what we have work. For the doubters, the most recent of two or three opinion polls—indeed, I have just been looking at one today—if they are to be believed, indicate a similar result if an election were to be held tomorrow.

Unfortunately, in spite of all the posturing by those opposite when they were courting the Independents for support that they would honour the verdict of the nation, their actions since make a mockery of this. Once it became clear that the majority of the Independents appeared to favour a continuation of the Labor government or were publicly sceptical of the coalition's credentials to govern, those opposite reverted to type—that is, opposition for opposition's sake, negative rather than constructive, all form and little substance, self-righteous unction and resorting to personal and political bullying.

Of course, the coalition was not alone in taking umbrage at a political result that it did not agree with. Serial conservative commentators, particularly those residing in the News Ltd stable, continued their crusade against Labor and the possibility of the Independents supporting a minority Labor government. From skewing published electorate polling in the seats of New England and Lyne to favour support for a coalition government to overplaying the 'he's nothing but a media tart' card, such commentators sought to pressure these politicians and their constituents alike

to reconsider any thoughts of siding with Labor. Still, these MPs are experienced enough to go their own way, and I suppose that is why the pro-coalition campaign, within and without, was so concentrated and at times dirty.

To help spice up the menu, News Ltd pumped out its daily horror stories about alleged failings in BER projects, attacked the integrity of the National Broadband Network, challenged the credibility of the pro-climate-change argument and hammered away at the so-called inequity of the minerals resources tax. All of these enterprises were not only owned by Labor but were regarded as significant determinants affecting the potential support of Independents such as Tony Windsor and Robert Oakeshott. Of course, we were all served up a number of unnamed 'senior Labor sources' who alleged caucus disunity, poor morale, et cetera et cetera. I would love to meet some of these unnamed senior Labor sources because I have never found one. However, who am I but a member of the caucus being allegedly reported on?

In the meantime, we had the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, the member for Sturt, Christopher Pyne, and others—indeed, others sitting at the table now—publicly pretending to seek a new style of politics, preaching of a 'more collegial polity'. However, as events unfolded, and as the early proceedings in this place have clearly demonstrated, this was nothing but empty rhetoric—cant to try and persuade the Independents to side with the coalition. The cant of this position was further demonstrated when, apart from some silly, but I suppose predictable, inflammatory comments from Senator Barnaby Joyce and negative mutterings from the Leader of the Nationals, Warren Truss, the Nationals themselves were completely sidelined in negotiations with the Independents. I wonder why?

I remember on 10 August—and the member for Goldstein, who is at the table, will clearly remember this—when Treasury calculated that the coalition costings were out by some \$800 million earlier in the campaign, and the coalition's immediate refusal to submit further costings to Treasury under the Charter of Budget Honesty provisions, how little media scrutiny of any substance was placed on the coalition over this, outside the Fairfax stable. It seems that, when it comes to financial accountability for our friends

amongst the conservative commentariat, there is only one side to scrutinise and pursue.

Of course, it had to take until after the election to expose the massive black hole surrounding the coalition's rubbery election commitments, especially in health, education, infrastructure and its paid maternity leave scheme. In all, Treasury analysis identified a hole of up to \$11 billion in the coalition's election promise costings. I repeat, for the members of this House and for *Hansard*: an \$11 billion black hole!

As the Independents continued to seek briefings from government and coalition representatives and agencies, and once the coalition's \$11 billion black hole in costings became public knowledge, Tony Abbott's political demeanour changed to type, as his sense of new-found political bonhomie began to fracture. I thought this was beautifully presented in the recent ABC *Four Corners* expose *The Deal*, which went to air on 4 October. I would like to quote some extracts:

Sarah Ferguson: While Tony Abbott was already trying to convince the Independents he was ready for a new style of politics—

with a quote from Tony Abbott at a press conference:

I think we can have a kinder, gentler polity. I think we can be a more collegial polity than we've been. I think that the spirit of parliament has been needlessly confrontational.

Sarah Ferguson again:

Tony Windsor isn't persuaded by Abbott's conversion.

She speaks to Tony Windsor in his office, and she asks:

Is that the Tony Abbott that you know?

Tony Windsor, the member for New England, says:

No. No I don't, and I think Tony Abbott's body language, ah, suggests that they're the words that he's got to say, rather than the words he actually believes.

What an excellent epitaph to the whole sordid business of those opposite who pretended that they wanted to make the parliamentary situation and the election result work.

Nothing I have seen in this 43rd parliament to date contradicts the member for New England's assessment of the Leader of the Opposition or the opposition's tactics. For example, the refusal of the opposition to allow its MPs to sit on the Speakers Panel, to help make this parliament work better. I ask you: is there anything more mean and puerile than that? And the threatening of non-cooperation regarding the pairing of members is proof of how the coalition really regards the new polity

which exists—or, more accurately, needs to exist for minority government to work.

Whilst the national result was very close, it seems the southern states of the nation remained solidly Labor, none more so than Tasmania. May I congratulate my colleague at the table, the member for Franklin, on her excellent result. I was greatly humbled by the result in Braddon, including the West Coast, and the significant swing to federal Labor. Whilst some commentators, particularly local ones, predicted a tighter struggle in Braddon, I was heartened by the response our team received out and about during the campaign. Indeed, with the focus of this parliament and government on regional communities and their needs, the opportunity exists for further investments in community and physical infrastructure and improved health, social and educational services, programs and funding in our region.

Our region, now happily including the West Coast, its people and resources, is a significant wealth generator in Tasmania. Like the remainder of regional Australia, we too seek a fair go and an equitable distribution of funding and services when compared to our metropolitan cousins. The emphasis of the new government on rolling out funding and services to regional areas like my own, including the National Broadband Network, will mean that we will become progressively more attractive as centres of business generation and places to live and raise a family. Indeed, better liveability and the huge potential derived from the rollout of the NBN increases our prospects of becoming a major attractor for people to move to our region from more populous centres to set up business, to raise a family, to retire and/or to change lifestyles.

Over the past three years our region has benefited from nearly \$450 million of investment and a number of Labor government initiatives, including the major economic stimulus measures adopted to tackle the global financial crisis; the educational and job-sustaining benefits of the Building the Education Revolution funding for each of our 63 local schools, almost totalling \$100 million; insulation for many hundreds of North-West Coast households; the increase in the First Home Buyers Grant; the long-awaited pension increase; the dozens of community infrastructure projects spread across all our municipalities; the removal of Work Choices; significant funding for improved health facilities and services, including the Mersey Community Hospital and two GP superclinics; and the commencement and rollout of the National Broadband Network. These and other positive initiatives I believe accounted for the comparatively strong vote for Labor particularly in Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia in the recent election.

Labor policies such as a national Paid Parental Leave Scheme, rolling out of the NBN, the health and hospitals reform package, construction of trades training centres, implementation of national curriculum reform, and establishing a minerals resource rent tax are to be rolled out in this next term and I look forward to more being done for mental health, establishing a universal dental care system, and better funding of aged care.

More locally, I look forward to delivering Labor's commitment to building the Devonport Regional Aquatic Centre, to setting up CCTV in Devonport, working with Simplot to establish a state-of-the-art cogeneration system at Ulverstone, and developing a regional cancer centre at the North-West Regional Hospital. I am also looking forward to the rollout of the North-West Tasmania Innovation and Investment Fund, which promises some exciting developments and new jobs for our region—unfortunately a region which has experienced serious unemployment issues with the cessation of our north-west paper mills, closing of parts of McCain's processing factory at Circular Head and more recently the impending closure of Tascott Templeton's carpet factory.

The coming parliamentary term will be very different from any I can recall since 1998 and indeed will be historic in many ways. I will do everything I can to make it work for the good of our nation, my state and most especially my region. The optimist in me says it can and will work with goodwill, providing that goodwill is actually there. But why wouldn't it be, because unlike most occasions, this parliament will rely on every individual member responding to the new circumstances, and why would you let such a precious individual opportunity pass by to be lost again in the collective mass of the party room and a dominant executive?

I would like to thank my hardworking, talented, loyal and wonderfully supportive office team of Luke, Kay, Luned, Karla, Tresa and Kim for the huge amount of work they have done on behalf of the many constituents who have sought our assistance over the past three years. I know this has in no small way contributed to our strong result. Our campaign team was large, enthusiastic and hardworking and I want to publicly thank everyone who helped out. I have individually thanked everyone on an earlier occasion but would like to especially acknowledge Luke Sayer and the office team, our doorknocking team, the sign construction and setting-up crew, postal vote campaign members, envelopers, polling booth volunteers, and the many well-wishers who gave of their time and support. A special thankyou also to my friend and colleague Senator Nick Sherry and to the state ALP secretary, John Dowling, and Mike O'Connor of the CFMEU.

Finally, may I thank my lovely family, Bronwyn, William and Julian, for all their loving support and their encouragement—in good times and those more difficult—to keep doing what I love: representing my region of North-West and West Tasmania in the national parliament.

Debate (on motion by **Ms King**) adjourned.