



**The Hon Jim Chalmers MP
Treasurer**

**HARD HEADS AND WARM HEARTS
THE 2023 SAMBELL ORATION
MELBOURNE
TUESDAY, 11 JULY 2023**

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri of the Kulin nation, your people, your customs and country –

Grateful for the warmth and grace you've received us with –

And for the invitation made to all of us, through the Uluru Statement of the Heart –

To go forward together, united –

With a Voice to Parliament that will help us make tangible improvements to the lives of First Nations people.

I know this was the central theme of last year's Oration, and I acknowledge the powerful contribution made then by Aunty Pat Anderson and my friend Professor Megan Davis.

As Megan said last year –

First Nations people have more reason than most to be pessimistic or to despair –

To reject the idea that this country can make the change that they need –

And yet, they choose to be hopeful.

From the other side of the canyon that lies between them and their fellow Australians –

In life expectancy, education outcomes, health, incarceration –

They have made a brave, gracious, and ultimately simple request –

For us to recognise, and to listen –

So that we may better lift each other up, and act where we can best help.

All of this goes right to the core of what's best about us, as Australians –

That's why I'm confident that before the end of the year –

When that generous request is put in front of the Australian people –

And if we do the work –

The answer will be yes.

I know that the Brotherhood of St. Laurence has been a strong supporter of the Voice.

So here, I'd like to thank them for that –

Also for Stephen Newton's kind introduction –

And to extend that gratitude to Travers, Susie King and everybody else who's played a role in bringing us together –

Including Clare Morgan from ANZ and the other sponsors.

Victorian Minister Ben Carroll –

Sue Boyle and Kay Hodson from YourTown, thanks for the work you do back home in Logan –

Kristy Muir and Bruce Bonyhady –

Jenny Macklin, and Ross, it means a lot that you're here.

Thank you Jenny, for decades of friendship, and leadership –

For a lifetime of standing up for, and speaking up for, the most vulnerable –

And for chairing our Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, with Travers as a key member and contributor.

I've known Travers almost as long as I've known Jenny.

Always admired his work, and the tireless, selfless dedicated way he goes about it –

On Jenny's Committee, but also with the National Early Years Strategy, and the upcoming Employment White Paper –

And before that at the Jobs and Skills Summit.

Trav made a terrific contribution to the session on boosting participation –

But I'm sure he won't mind me saying we were all overshadowed by an incredible presentation by Nathan –

Who talked about how the Brotherhood of St. Laurence helped him find purpose in life, through meaningful work.

But more than that, it was the Brotherhood that helped him find what he called "the endless courage" needed to break through.

Nathan, thanks for sharing your experiences with us –

And to you and Gabrielle for MCing this opportunity to talk about how we're approaching the big national challenges and chances of the months and years ahead.

I want to cover a fair bit of ground tonight because it's a rare opportunity in front of such an informed and engaged audience.

My point tonight is this:

Responsible economic management and compassion are complementary, not at odds.

Ours is a government of hard heads *and* warm hearts.

That colours our approach to the economic conditions and our Budget strategy – including what we're doing to help the most vulnerable.

I know that's of vital interest to everyone here.

And I really want to cover two other core points tonight as well.

To speak at greater length about our place-based approach to dealing with disadvantage.

No one here needs introducing to this idea, but I can flesh out a bit the policies we're pursuing.

And then just as importantly, I want you to know what we're doing to renovate our institutions and to 'measure what matters' with our new wellbeing framework.

Again, I know these are areas many people here have talked about for a lifetime; again, I want you to know what we're actually doing about it.

I can't explain all that without sharing a few things about the character of the Albanese Government a little over a year in, because that is infused in our approach to what's next.

First, Anthony demands that we take a methodical approach.

Whether the issues we confront are new or inherited, we work through them in a carefully considered and consultative way.

We are not about a blizzard of activity, we make sense of the work through a series of staging points of progress.

This is true across the board, and in my portfolio –

Two budgets already, six months apart –

A Jobs Summit –

Decisive interventions in the energy market –

Tax reform across super, the PRRT and multinationals –

Two detailed and successful submissions to the Fair Work Commission seeking decent minimum wage rises –

A new payments system for the digital economy –

A completely new approach to sustainable finance –

A plan to modernise the Reserve Bank, and the beginnings of a plan to strengthen the Productivity Commission as well.

And in the next three months we'll be releasing Australia's first national wellbeing framework, the new Intergenerational Report, and the Employment White Paper.

This is a deliberate effort to focus the economic debate on people, the future and opportunities.

We'll talk more about this tonight too.

The second broad point is that our method has a purpose –

To align what we want for our society with what we want for our economy.

This was the major point of the piece I wrote for *the Monthly* over summer, and it's the major point of our Government too.

The reaction to that piece was revealing, I think, because it exposed the dispute at the heart of economic debate in Australia:

Between those who believe the fossilised fallacy that our economic and social objectives must be in conflict not concert – and those who reject it.

It's a nice irony that the former conservative government's economic thought was fuelled by a fossilised idea.

But sadly, that's why they wasted a decade, and sadly, that same myth underpins a surprising share of the commentary still.

We have to show, as well as tell, that we don't need to choose between acting responsibly with the budget and governing with compassion.

In fact, one makes the other possible.

Rejecting these dichotomies –

Wellbeing versus prosperity –

Society versus economy –

Compassion versus responsibility –

Defines the character of our Government –

A government of hard heads and warm hearts –

And it underpins our broader Budget strategy as well.

We confront together our fair share of economic challenges, but we have strengths too –

The fastest jobs growth of any new government, ever –

Record employment and participation –

The beginnings of some decent wages growth after a decade of stagnation –

And strong prices for what we sell to the world.

This will all help us withstand the serious turbulence ahead.

Right now, inflation is moderating, but it will be higher than we'd like, for longer than we'd like –

And our economy is slowing because of interest rate rises, plus the impact of substantial global economic uncertainty.

The impact of higher prices and a slowing economy is felt disproportionately by people already doing it toughest.

In this complex environment, textbook fiscal policy requires us to take the pressure off inflation by rebuilding our buffers –

To find ways of relieving cost of living pressures without adding to them –

Meaningful tax reform to help fund our responsibilities –

Returning most revenue upgrades to the bottom line –

Keeping real spending growth down, focused on where we can make the most positive impact –

Finding significant savings where there's been waste or warped priorities –

Prioritising the most vulnerable –

And the most urgent areas like rent, electricity, out-of-pocket health costs, and wages.

Our efforts to strengthen the Budget have not in any way come at the expense of helping people.

The bigger surplus is in addition to, not instead of, cost of living relief.

In fact, our responsible economic management gives us room to deliver permanent increases to Commonwealth income support payments:

A \$40 per fortnight increase to JobSeeker –

And for those on Youth Allowance, Austudy and other income support payments.

Extra support for recipients aged 55 and over, mostly women, recognising the extra challenges they face in finding work.

Expanding the availability of the Parenting Payment to single parents until their youngest child turns 14, rather than 8.

And the biggest increase in Rent Assistance in 30 years.

We're proud of the room we found in the Budget to make these changes.

But I also know, from my own community in Logan, that lifting people up – especially kids – is about more than increasing payments.

It's about recognising that some suburbs struggle more than others and need extra attention.

It's about understanding the impact on real people and real communities when that disadvantage is intergenerational.

I've seen for myself, in the community I grew up in and represent now, the difference that place-based community leadership can make to people.

In the moment when they realise for the first time, that they're welcomed and valued at their local footy club –

When a child finds herself on stage, and then on stage, *finds* herself –

Or finds a place where they can play, learn, and explore safely after school –

A place where a role model shows up and tells them, maybe for the first time, that they matter, that they have value and that they have a contribution to make.

You can't broaden someone's horizons without understanding their neighbourhoods.

That's why in the May Budget we announced a new place-based approach that we'll build over time –

Trusting in local communities and the programs that work, to break down barriers and expand opportunity –

Learning from the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, and all that you've already done with your focus on place – especially on youth unemployment.

We're beginning with five key initiatives:

One, more funding for place-based partnerships, to embed and to take them further –

Two, encouraging the development of evidence-based policy, directed at a local level –

Three, investment in projects that are delivering measurable success –

Four, a new partnership that will help government and philanthropy to co-ordinate their efforts –

And five, new indexation arrangements that will make it easier for community groups to pay their workers and pay their bills.

Alongside this is the most basic place-based policy of them all: more secure, affordable homes.

Just this morning, I spent some time in Wyndham with Joanne Ryan and Tim Watts, at a social housing development for women experiencing family violence, or who are at risk of homelessness.

These are just the kind of projects that will be built thanks to the \$2 billion social housing accelerator announced by the Prime Minister last month –

And that's not where our housing agenda ends.

We're introducing new incentives to encourage build-to-rent projects –

We're expanding NHFIC's capacity to lend to community housing providers –

We're offering \$1.7 billion to extend the National Housing and Homeless Agreement with the states and territories –

And we'll keep on working to pass the legislation which would build more than 30,000 additional social and affordable homes.

So, the Albanese Government is working methodically and with purpose – fighting through the inflationary pressures with responsible economic management that underpins targeted cost of living relief.

We are implementing long-overdue innovations to reverse disadvantage, working with people in place, and intervening in the housing crisis after a decade of waste and neglect.

We're restoring and reforming institutions like the Reserve Bank and the Productivity Commission.

And the public service. This is not the occasion for a longer commentary, but believe me when I tell you –

The mean-spirited madness that underpinned Robodebt will never happen again.

We will, once and for all, do away with this idea that our society is made up of 'lifters and leaners' –

'Workers and shirkers'.

Instead, our focus will remain on what we can achieve together –

By strengthening our social contract, not trashing it –

By being there for those who need us, not demonising them –

And by working to create a society in which we gather people in, so that we may lift them up –

In ways that enhance all of us.

All this, and the core of our economic plan –

Is about building healthier, more secure and cohesive communities and a more sustainable and prosperous economy.

But ultimately if we want to be confident of our progress here –

Then we've got to measure it better.

Of course, we already do that through our traditional economic metrics of GDP, income, and employment.

They are important but they don't capture the full story.

I think we're mature enough as a country, and as a society, to recognise that other things matter too –

The health of our people –

The state of our environment –

How much time people spend at work, at home, with their kids, in traffic –

And whether people feel connected to each other, or not.

That's why I'm proud to say that in the next few weeks I'm looking to release 'Measuring What Matters', Australia's first national, wellbeing framework –

This will help us to track our journey towards a healthier, more sustainable, cohesive, secure, and prosperous society that gives every person ample opportunity to build lives of meaning and purpose.

That's how we've chosen to think about wellbeing in the framework –

And under those five themes – healthy, secure, sustainable, cohesive, and prosperous –

The Statement will outline around 50 indicators of wellbeing that we'll be tracking through time.

In developing the framework, we consulted broadly across the community, including with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence –

Received over 280 submissions –

And drew on international examples –

To try and capture the things that matter most to us.

Still, this is our first crack at it, and we're not expecting everybody to agree with every element of our approach.

There will be a range of views and plenty of commentary on what we've chosen to include and what we haven't –

And that's a good thing.

Any framework which seeks to capture the core components of wellbeing is bound to need refining over time –

And we're up for the necessary conversations to get it right.

Measuring What Matters is about getting a better sense of how our people are tracking – what we're doing well and what we need to do better –

And it'll inform how we can make progress together.

Soon after the wellbeing framework, we'll be releasing a new Intergenerational Report that will examine the challenges and opportunities from the big shifts and forces impacting our economy –

Something that will give us a big picture view of the things that we'll need to manage and maximise to improve the wellbeing of our people over time.

Then, after that, our Employment White Paper –

A roadmap for a more inclusive, dynamic labour market that makes the most of people's talents –

And that will help us to grasp the big opportunities in education and employment that the Prime Minister has been talking about recently.

All this will play a big role in settling our thinking on the opportunities in front of us.

This gathering that I've been privileged to address tonight, is named in honour of Geoffrey Sambell –

A great leader of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence –

And somebody who was focused on creating a more inclusive, more just society.

The referendum that we'll have towards the end of the year is another staging point on that same journey –

And while we can't know what Geoffrey Sambell would've made of it, history allows us to take a pretty good guess.

After leaving the Brotherhood in 1969, he became Archbishop of Perth.

And it was in that role, in August 1977 –

That he stood outside a Local Court, having just been fined for allowing First Nations people to take shelter on one of his church grounds –

And declared that he was ready to partner with anybody who would work with him to provide the housing these Australians deserved.

Even on a day where the structures of law and power had only reinforced injustice –

When they'd worked against the principles that Geoffrey held so closely to –

He still believed, as we do, in our ability to make progress.

I think he'd recognise the Voice as a critical part of this bigger, national story that we're writing together.

A story in which a more vibrant society –

Continues to underpin and reinforce a more productive, thriving, inclusive economy –

Opening more windows of opportunity, for more Australians –

In a commonwealth of common purpose.

Not defined by zero-sum politics, or division, or decay –

But by partnership, collaboration, recognition, and progress –

As we work to deliver a better, fairer, future in which all of our people can prosper, and of which all of us can be proud.

Thanks very much.

ENDS