

The Australia United Plan and Associated Plans as One Set of Solutions to the Huge Under-acknowledged Crises in Australian Health, Education, Manufacturing and the Environment Which Demand an End to State Governments or a Fully Seamless National Economy at the Very Least.

*Speech by Dr Mark Drummond, Convenor of Beyond Federation
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in the Jim Snow Room, R. B. Smith Community Centre, Queanbeyan
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Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and thanks especially Peter Consandine for giving me the opportunity to talk at this convention. And congratulations also Peter for continuing your government system reform advocacy so conscientiously for so many years, leading to this 26th National Republican Convention.

I speak here on behalf of myself and also my friends in the Beyond Federation organisation who, like me, support the idea that Australia should do away with its State and Territory governments in a series of processes that transfer powers and responsibilities to our national and local governments, or national and regional governments.

Up front I should mention that whilst I personally believe Australia should become a Republic, because I strongly oppose the hereditary principle as a basis for assigning public power, not everyone in the Beyond Federation group supports a Republic, so Beyond Federation doesn't support a Republic. I similarly support the proportional representation voting system supported by many Australians including my fellow speaker today, Bogey Musidlak, of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia. But not everyone in Beyond Federation supports proportional representation and for that reason and other reasons I'll later explain, the Australia United Plan doesn't support proportional representation nor any other form of voting.

My talk today will centre on a two page plan I came up with in May 2009 after years of thought and reflection and fruitful discussion among my friends in the "abolish the States" cause, and refined to its current form in October 2009, called the Australia United Plan, which you all have a copy of to take away and hopefully look over and think about a little after today. The Australia United Plan, which reflects years of thinking and discussion among members of Beyond Federation and the broader "abolish the States" cause, as stated in the plan itself:

comprises objectives, outcomes and a five stage transition plan designed to achieve full Unification for Australia by the year 2020.

I'll begin with a brief introduction to what Unification is about, and a brief summary of the Australia United Plan. I'll then describe several *genuinely* serious crises that Australia is facing *right now* that urgently demand *very* serious responses and reforms along the lines of the Australia United Plan, and which show no signs of being addressed without reforms along these lines. My talk will conclude with a series of additional plans which I believe need to be implemented urgently in order to overcome these crises, all of which could be funded and otherwise achieved through the successful achievement of the Australia United Plan.

Unification

Unification is a word that was used from the late 1800s till the early 1970s or so to describe the move to an Australia with just a single national government and no separate colonial or State governments, so support for Unification essentially equates to support for the abolition of State governments, or the amalgamation or coalescence or fusion of State, Territory and Commonwealth governments to form a single national government for Australia. The Australian Labor Party expressed support for Unification in its policy platform from 1915 until 1971, so that's nearly half of the ALP's twelve decade history. And many Labor politicians have supported Unification both prior to 1915 and after 1971, including Jim Snow, the long term Queanbeyan-based local member for Eden-Monaro, from 1983 till 1996, in whose honour the room we're in today is named, and former Prime Ministers Gough Whitlam and Bob Hawke. Unification has also been supported by the Australian Democrats and the Australian Greens throughout most of their histories, and by current day politicians including the Independent politician Tony Windsor and the Nationals Senator Barnaby Joyce, and also by two of the pre-eminent giants of the Liberal-Country Coalition in the form of Prime Ministers Sir Earle Page and Sir Robert Menzies – though I should clarify that Page and Menzies spoke and wrote in support of Unification in years *before* they became Prime Minister. I can provide excellent documentary evidence in support of all of these claims in the form of various written pieces and media reports. Liberal Leaders, including Prime Minister John Howard, and also John Hewson and Tony Abbott, have also spoken in support of Unification, or something very close to it, in recent years. So it's clear that there's strong support for Unification, or something close to it, right across the political spectrum, and opinion polls have regularly revealed that across the Australian population as a whole, about 30% to 80% of the population support either full Unification or other reforms approaching full Unification, such as moves towards a single set of laws throughout the country, or national government control over areas such as health and education.

The Australia United Plan

I'd now like to start talking about the Australia United Plan in more detail, in terms of its two reform objectives, the nine outcomes the plan hopes to achieve, and five stages considered necessary in order to fully achieve the transition to full Unification and an Australia without State governments. My talk also offers some brief thoughts on the extent to which reforms that are actually happening in Australia are keeping pace with the timeline envisaged in the Australia United Plan's overall objective for Unification by 2020, and its five transition stages.

Two Reform Objectives

The first reform objective is simply the Unification (or amalgamation) of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to achieve a strong national government. The second is strengthened local governments.

And that's it – just two simple "what you see is what you get" goals.

The plan neither supports nor opposes a Republic, as I mentioned earlier, because if support for or opposition to a Republic became part of the plan, then the abolish the States cause would probably suddenly lose a significant fraction of its supporters.

The plan doesn't support any particular form of voting either, for similar reasons, as I mentioned earlier.

The plan is also intentionally silent on whether regional governments, as generally understood, should be created once the States are gone. Some members of Beyond Federation and the broader abolish the States cause believe we should move to a system of regional governments with forms somewhere between the ACT government model and a local council, but others believe national and local governments can provide an excellent system of government without the need for regional governments, especially if national and local governments are supported by regional administration and governance structures like those already in place at the State and Territory levels for numerous public and private sector purposes. Peter I know you support a regional government model with 30 or so regions, and good on you for promoting such a model. Members of Beyond Federation such as our Founding Convenor Jim Snow, and also Charles Mollison, the Chairman of the Foundation for National Renewal, support regional government models. Jim favours 30 regions and Charles 100 odd. The Australia United Plan doesn't oppose your plan Peter, nor any other regional government model, but it doesn't support such a model either. Nor does the plan seek to micro-manage the number of local governments or regional governments, or whatever sub-national governments are called. Rather, it allows for sub-national local or regional government structures to evolve over time according to the democratically expressed wishes of local communities. Some parts of the country might decide that they wish for their local governments to merge into regional governments, as has occurred in a less than voluntary manner in much of Australia in recent decades, especially in Victoria in the mid 1990s, and in Queensland just several years ago. But others may prefer for their local governments to remain smaller, and I for one don't think anyone has the right to be telling local communities how big or small their local government should be. I believe all communities have a fundamental right to a local government they can call their own.

Nine Outcomes

Moving on now to the nine outcomes the Australia United Plan hopes to achieve, the first outcome envisaged by the plan is a huge financial boost, to the tune of about \$20 billion per annum in the public sector, \$40 billion per annum in the private sector, and at least \$50 billion per annum, or about five per cent of Gross Domestic Product, across the Australian economy as a whole, in 2009 dollar terms, so I'll need to revisit these figures some time soon to bring them up to date. And the idea is that these tens of billions of dollars will not all be pocketed as savings and tax cuts, but, rather, used to provide a combination of tax cuts for businesses large and small, to a point where the manufacturing and other industries can look forward to a viable and sustainable future, and investment increases also, to achieve service and outcome improvements in areas such as health care, dental care, aged care, education, transport and communications, the environment – and the list goes on across all areas of public service, commerce, industry and community. There really could be "something for everyone", so to speak, as these billions of dollars are made available for constructive use.

The second self-explanatory outcome listed on the plan is improved democracy and government at national and local levels. The third is the obvious outcome that there would be no State or Territory governments. A seamless national economy and a seamless national approach to environmental management are also sought. And this doesn't mean that highly centralised approaches to economic and environmental management are sought. It simply means that there'd be an end to border anomalies and inconsistent approaches on different sides of political borders. National health and education systems are sought to enable billions of dollars per annum to be shifted from duplicated bureaucracy and regulation into hospitals and schools and other units of our health and education systems. A single set of laws for all of Australia is sought, as part of a national system of law, order and safety comprising a single national police force and a single national court system headed by the High Court or a reformed Supreme Court, with a hierarchy of County Courts or District Courts and Magistrates Courts or Local Courts much like we have in the Australian States at present. Federal Courts wouldn't be needed any longer. So there'd be great scope to significantly enhance

the procedural and justice providing efficiency of the Australian legal system. The ninth and final outcome sought in the Australia United Plan is regional administration and cooperation not constrained by State and Territory borders. This mainly just means that whereas State and Territory administrative subdivisions current start and end at State and Territory borders, under the Australia United Plan regional administrative boundaries would be free to be drawn according to functional imperatives and priorities.

The Five Stage Transition Plan

The Australia United Plan aims to achieve full Unification for Australia by the year 2020 through the completion of five transition stages, but I'm only going to focus today on the first Foundation Laying stage which, whilst progressing very well in some significant ways, as I'll soon explain, is clearly unlikely to be completely fulfilled by the target year of 2013 that is stated in the plan. I've not lost hope that we'll achieve full Unification by the year 2020, but I accept that the Foundation Laying Stage 1 won't be completed by 2013, and I'm open to the likelihood now that full Unification is unlikely to be achieved by 2020. I'll look forward to talking more about Stages 2 to 5, covering the period from 2013 to 2020, at some later time.

Of the four foundation laying components of Stage 1 of the plan, represented by the four dot points shown there, one component is progressing very effectively indeed, that being the ongoing efforts to establish national health, education and legal systems – such as the efforts to establish the national school curriculum, national occupational health and safety laws, and national registration systems for businesses, tradespeople, professionals and tertiary education providers and courses, and almost too many other areas to keep up with. Indeed, these moves to national systems and approaches are happening almost as fast as could ever reasonably be expected or hoped for by those supportive of such reforms, in view of the different political parties in power around the country in current and recent times, and other pressing matters on the public agenda. I'd even go as far as saying that if these reforms towards national approaches were taking place any faster than they are now, then I think the wheels could be at risk of falling off, so to speak, and we could scare off the horses too much as well, and worthy reforms could be undermined by such haste.

Reading through the other dot point components of Stage 1 of the plan, there's been significant steps taken towards the achievement of constitutional recognition of local government in Australia in recent years, but I'm extremely disappointed that the mode of constitutional recognition envisaged seems likely to leave local government in Australia remaining extremely disempowered, as it has been throughout its history, both financially and generally, in current times accounting for just seven per cent of total government spending, compared to about 10 per cent in New Zealand, 18 per cent in Canada, and about 25 per cent in the United States and the United Kingdom. I'm also disappointed that highly inefficient State and Territory taxes such as payroll taxes still remain. These taxes on employment should have been abolished long ago.

In relation to the fourth and final dot point component of Stage 1, my own personal family and work circumstances since 2009 have left me unable to do much in the way of lobbying key stakeholders to help them understand how financial benefits in the order of at least \$50 billion per annum in 2009 dollar terms, or about five per cent of GDP, can be achieved across the economy overall under a two-tiered government structure comprising national and local governments, but no State and Territory governments. That said, there's clearly widespread consensus that intelligent rationalisations of Australia's political structures and regulatory systems could benefit Australia's economy and people to the tune of \$50 billion to \$100 billion per annum. As just one example of this, in a September 2011 interview on ABC's Lateline TV program, Presenter Ticky Fullerton and Heather Ridout of the Australian Industry Group stated as follows, quoting from the transcript on the ABC website:

TICKY FULLERTON, PRESENTER: Government red tape: it's the curse of business and getting worse, according to a new survey.

Around 70 per cent of firms contacted by the Australia Industry Group and Deloitte say they've experienced a rise in compliance costs over the last three years.

Some one third complain that regulations are a substantial barrier to employing more staff.

HEATHER RIDOUT, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, AIG: Companies are saying that the cost to them is some 4 per cent of total costs which, when you extrapolate it across the economy, translates to well over \$90 billion.

And this is not just about occupational health and safety and employment regulation more generally; it's the cost of doing trade, both importing and exporting, it's in environmental regulation and it's tax regulation.

Genuine Crises Demanding Serious Responses

I'd like to now move on to the issue of several extremely serious crises happening in Australia right now that I believe will only ever be addressed through the Australia United Plan or similarly substantial reforms.

If Australia's major political parties are to be believed, the biggest crisis facing Australia in this early part of the twenty-first century has been the very small number of people in the very small number of boats who have come across the seas to share our boundless plains as encouraged by the relevant lines of our national anthem.

It's bad enough that so many of Australia's most powerful politicians have been so frightened and fearful of essentially non-existent threats, but even worse that this staggering exaggeration of a minuscule threat to Australian national security has distracted the attention of so many Australians for such lengthy amounts of time, and diverted billions of dollars' worth of financial, human and material resources, away from the numerous *genuine* economic, social and environmental crises affecting the lives of many millions of Australian people and also Australia's flora and fauna and natural environment generally.

Crises of Life and Death Gravity

There really is a crisis in rural health right now, for example, with crippling shortages of doctors and nurses and other health workers in many parts of Australia, and no solution in sight to this problem. There are doctors working 20 hour days all over Australia who might as well be drunk on the job. And it's the same with truck drivers required to meet unrealistic and unsafe deadlines on our highways.

The Crisis of Insecure Work

The relentless casualisation and the erosion of employment security in Australia's private and public sector workforces alike is another national crisis, and national disgrace, wreaking havoc on the health, wellbeing and social fabric of individuals, families, households and communities across the nation, which makes one wonder what on earth governments, businesses, unions and other

stakeholders have been doing over recent years to overcome exploitative work practices which shame all decent Australians. If anyone wonders why the Labor Party is in such bad shape in Australia in 2012, one only has to look at the manner in which the Labor Party and the unions which the ALP is based around, and their comfortable highly paid leaders, have sat back and done little or nothing to arrest the casualisation of the Australian workforce and the decline in employment security of millions of Australians. When Unification was on the ALP policy platform, support for public schools and employment security was ALP policy too, whereas today, the ALP seem to care nothing about public education and employment security, their leaders and apparatchiks seemingly caring only about themselves. The Liberal, Nationals and Greens political parties weren't established with secure employment and sound working conditions as the very core of their existence! The ALP was!! To be fair, the Australian Council of Trade Unions is currently finalising a stupendously significant and valuable inquiry into insecure work in Australia – a classic case of better late than never which can hopefully arrest the shameful decline in working conditions of Australian workers over recent years and decades!

The crisis of insecure employment leads on to further crises present in our universities, TAFE colleges and schools at present.

Crises in Education – Market Failures and Regulatory Failures on a Massive Scale

Universities and TAFE colleges are up to their eyeballs in this development towards casualised workplaces, almost leading the way with workforce casualisation they claim is being forced on them because Australian governments provide them with such inadequate funding. We have a ridiculous situation where governments in Australia waste tens of billions of dollars every year in duplicated government, bureaucracy and regulation, so millions of dollars every day, and leave so little for education at all levels to the point where universities, TAFE colleges and schools are constantly operating under severe financial constraint, and teacher pay levels are insufficient to the point where demand for properly qualified teachers vastly outstrips supply, so huge proportions of Australian students are right now being taught by teachers who lack the subject matter and teaching qualifications required by common sense and by Commonwealth, State and Territory laws and regulations to lawfully teach what they are teaching. So there's a massive failure in the teaching labour market, demanding significantly increased investment by governments as the standard text book remedy. And the employment of teachers who lack the teaching qualifications required by Commonwealth, State and Territory laws and regulations obviously extends well beyond market failure to amount to equally massive failures of regulation, auditing, accountability, transparency and compliance.

Medical doctors and nurses really do need to have formally recognised medical and nursing qualifications to practice in Australia's public and private sectors as doctors and nurses, and you probably won't be surprised to hear that TAFE colleges and other education providers really are required to have properly qualified teachers to maintain their registration as Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) as required to maintain their entitlement to receive government funding and maintain their very operation. But they don't in all too many cases. A 2011 Productivity Commission report estimated that about 40% of Australian TAFE teachers, for example, lack the teaching qualifications they're required to hold, and a March 2010 article in the Campus Review newspaper claimed that "nearly 60 per cent of the TAFE workforce have no teaching qualifications". The TAFE colleges with massive proportions of people teaching without teaching qualifications are breaking laws and regulatory requirements set by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. But governments and their regulatory agencies seem to have just sat back and effectively covered up these serious breaches of serious laws and regulations on a massive systemic scale – all in preference to competent remedies in the form of improved government investment in public education sufficient to ensure that all students in universities, TAFE colleges

and schools are taught by teachers who are properly qualified and competent to teach in their respective sectors. The Australia United Plan can provide the billions of dollars needed each year to overcome these problems.

The legitimate response to market failure and regulatory failure in the circumstances just described in relation to TAFE colleges is competent government intervention. To be blunt, teachers need to be paid more, and I declare an interest here in that I'm a teacher myself. But it's ludicrous that some public servants, not to mention bank executives, are earning five and even 10 and 20 and 50 times more money than teachers who are doing work that is some of the most important work done in our world in settings with a vastly higher degree of relentless pressure and difficulty than those experienced by senior executives in the private and public sectors alike.

The Australia United Plan seeks to re-direct several billion dollars per annum from what is currently tied up in duplicated government, bureaucracy and regulation into our schools and tertiary education providers to enable them to pay teachers the salaries needed to ensure that all students in Australian universities, TAFE colleges and schools are taught by teachers who are properly qualified and competent.

Skills Shortage Crises and School Kids Being Targeted as Factory Fodder and Shop Fodder

The crisis in Australian education is linked to Australia's skills crisis, and as I'll now explain, the skills crisis is also an equity and justice crisis on a massive scale which represents yet another national disgrace which I believe the Australia United Plan is well equipped to overcome.

Students at most public schools and also many non-government schools are currently far from sufficiently protected from highly questionable and sometimes quite disgraceful public and private sector responses to Australia's current labour and skills shortages, such that students in vast numbers are currently being quite aggressively shunted away from their true dreams and aspirations down vocational pathways and directions that are not at all of the students' own choosing. Students at these schools are increasingly being targeted and indeed harvested and almost conscripted by unscrupulous politicians and other ethically challenged leaders in public and private sectors as shop fodder and factory fodder, expected to step up to the front line to overcome labour and skills shortages created by defective planning by politicians and other public and private sector leaders of past generations, with complete and reckless disregard for what the school students themselves actually want to do in their future lives.

At the same time, exclusive schools – especially selective and expensive ones – continue to shelter and quarantine their students from these skills shortage problems. They do a great job to effectively put up huge metaphorical protective walls around their lands and say to all comers, including politicians, bureaucrats, the media and others: don't you dare tell our students what their future aims should be; don't you dare interfere with the choices our students are making about their future plans; our students can dream as high as they like, and pursue their dreams however they like, and woe betide any politician or other person who dares to try and restrict out students' future plans in any way.

By reducing the massive current levels of duplicated bureaucracy and regulation, the Australia United Plan can free up huge numbers of skilled people and billions of dollars sufficient to enable significant taxation reductions and otherwise enable public and private sector businesses to offer salaries and working conditions that can largely or wholly solve Australia's skills shortages under ethically sound free labour market forces, such that coercion and press-ganging that seems to be happening at present can be largely or wholly consigned to history.

Crises in Manufacturing and Other Industries

It's galling to see factories closing and entire chains of manufacturing industry being allowed to die slow deaths in Australia as witnessed in parts of the automotive manufacturing sector in recent times. Our political and business leaders are kicking huge numbers of own goals if they think it's better to retain our horse and buggy political system than it is to maintain sustainably successful businesses and industries.

The tens of billions of dollars that the Australia United Plan can free up, and the vast levels of regulatory rationalisation the plan can achieve, can deliver huge tax and red tape reductions for Australian businesses of all sizes that can massively improve their ability to survive and thrive in a challenging national and global economy.

Environmental Crises

As but one example of an environmental crisis in Australia, the Murray Darling basin is constantly close to crisis point, as widely acknowledged by farmers, environmentalists, scientists and others stakeholders, and the Australia United Plan can provide the financial and human resources needed to deliver improved outcomes. There are also numerous under-acknowledged crises affecting Australia's natural environment such as the slaughter of kangaroos and kangaroo joeys on a scale that well exceeds Japanese whaling and the infamous seal clubbing slaughters, for example. The money the Australia United Plan can free up can hopefully support environmentally and ethically improved ways of dealing with our natural environments.

Not Everyone is in Crisis – Some Have it Too Good to be True, Fair and Competent

A final point about the many crises Australia is currently facing is that whilst many Australians are experiencing the challenges of crises on several fronts on a daily basis, some lucky individuals and components of Australian society are utterly thriving at present – at the expense of those losing out, in a zero sum sort of sense.

Australia's banks and their shareholders seem to be doing *very* well, and their senior executives in vast numbers are paid at levels vastly exceeding the Prime Minister's salary, for example. Huge economically and ethically indefensible pay rises gained by senior executives over recent decades mean that ever increasing levels of public and private sector wealth is being siphoned off into individual bank accounts. And on this point, it's one thing that creative and risk-taking entrepreneurs earn themselves big dollars, but quite another that the heads of what used to be government owned utilities are siphoning off so many billions of dollars that benefit them and their families to obscene extents, at the expense of Australians at large, in a zero sum sense again.

Australian government bureaucracies are also becoming increasingly top-heavy, with ridiculously excessive and growing numbers in senior executive positions on large six figure salaries across Commonwealth, State and Territory governments.

Waiting lists for expensive private schools in Australia are also absolutely thriving, and with demand for private school places exceeding the supply of available places as indicated by lengthy waiting lists, private school fees have risen at about twice the rate of inflation in recent years, even at times when expensive private schools have been receiving more money from governments than they've ever received before.

Hugely excessive numbers of senior public servants in our massively duplicated Commonwealth, State and Territory bureaucracies, and excessive numbers of excessively paid senior executives in our again massively duplicated major banks, and other utilities companies previously owned by governments, provide an ample supply of Australians able to bid up the price of school fees at already expensive private schools, and get their children into schools where they'll be free to pursue their dreams, and sheltered from labour and skills shortages, though curiously, and perhaps ironically, many graduates of expensive private schools end up as senior bureaucrats, and so the cycle continues on through successive generations, even if their true dreams and aspirations lie elsewhere. There's an almost symbiotic relationship between expensive schools on the one hand, and duplicated bureaucracy and excessive numbers of highly paid public service positions on the other, such that large numbers of people with large salaries are needed to enable expensive private schools to survive and thrive, but, significantly, these schools also rely upon the continued availability of plum public service career opportunity pathways in sufficient numbers to ensure that graduates of these private schools can always find highly paid jobs that justify and render worthwhile the high fees paid for their education, and enable the cycle to continue to the next generation. Am I just being cynical here? Or have I picked up on something that insufficient attention has been given to for far too long? Whatever the case, the Australia United Plan can enable *all* schools – public and private – to be better funded, and can allow more Australian public and private school students to pursue their true dreams and aspirations when they leave school. There'd be less senior bureaucratic positions under the Australia United Plan than there are now, but this can surely only be a win-win-win all round, because, after all, whilst many children end up as senior public servants, and a good number aspire to politics and public leadership of some form, I've never met a single child who has expressed a dream or aspiration to be a career or senior bureaucrat or public servant as such!

Further Plans in Support of the Australia United Plan

To wind my talk to a close, I'll now briefly sketch half a dozen additional plans in support of the Australia United Plan, where all of these at this point are quite embryonic. But what they all have in common is that they could easily be funded by the tens of billions of dollars the Australia United Plan can free up.

Sustainable Industry Plan

The sustainable industry plan seeks to enable Australian manufacturing and other industries to survive sustainably into the future in a global environment which can be expected to remain challenging continuously into the future.

This plan calls for a fully seamless national economy, either as part of the fulfilment of the Australia United Plan or otherwise, to create less red tape, compliance burdens and business frictions generally. The plan also calls for the abolition of payroll tax and a reduction of business taxes generally so that overall business tax levels reduce about five to 10 per cent below current levels and the need for tax concessions is also reduced, and we move beyond the ridiculous churning of taxes and tax concessions that currently occurs such that it's hard to keep track of what is a tax and what is a tax concession. Some people complain that the manufacturing industry is currently receiving handouts or "business welfare payments" through tax concessions, but if tax levels were lower, manufacturers wouldn't need such concessions, and who is to say that current taxation levels are the right level and competent? If manufacturers are struggling to survive, that tells me that tax levels are probably too high at the moment. The tax reduction level, currently envisaged to be in the 5 to 10 per cent range as just mentioned, should be determined on the basis of robust economic and financial modelling.

Education Investment Plan

The funding of public education should be seen as the definitive public investment, and capital C core business of government.

As called for by the recent Gonski Review of school funding, there's an utterly urgent need for Australian governments to find in the order of \$5 billion per annum more for school funding generally, and public school funding in particular. The Australia United Plan can easily free up these funds.

Significant fractions of our children are being failed by our school systems and urgently need to be provided with small group and often one on one support to help them achieve sound levels of literacy, numeracy and other skills needed in their lives.

The Australia United Plan can free up the many billions of dollars per annum needed to enable massive funding increases urgently needed for public schools, and fair funding of non-government schools which might well involve significant funding increases for many private schools who are not favoured overly well by current non-government school funding arrangements.

Skills Investment Plan

As noted earlier in this talk, secondary schools throughout Australia are increasingly being targeted for factory fodder, and shop fodder, and I believe governments need to take their claws off our kids and leave them far more free to pursue their dreams and aspirations. The skills shortage should be resolved by financially comfortable politicians and other public and private sector leaders, not by vulnerable school leavers yet to gain financial security and independence. The Skills Investment Plan will involve the injection of sufficient funding levels to constantly enable Australian adults to re-skill in areas of labour and skills need, and leave school kids free to chase their dreams.

School Leaver Empowerment Plan

All school leavers should be provided with an up-front voucher of say \$10,000, or another amount to be determined, or perhaps a fortnightly Austudy type income, to complete a qualification in a field of their choice at a TAFE college or public university or a private tertiary education provider, or through an employer in an on-the-job training capacity.

Indigenous Empowerment Plan

In my discussion of current crises, I left out discussion on the many compounding crises impacting adversely upon our precious Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. There are about as many indigenous Australians as there are Tasmanians, but whereas Tasmanians currently enjoy the political and financial empowerment of a State Government, 12 Senators and generous funding levels provided via Commonwealth Grants Commission methodologies, all by virtue of Tasmania's previous status as a British penal colony, indigenous Australians have been provided with no financial or political empowerment whatsoever in the Australian Constitution, which, to me, is one of the most shameful aspects of Australian society. I'd love to see more Australians take this sort of concern seriously.

As a first basic effort, the Indigenous Empowerment Plan could involve constitutional amendment that would enable indigenous Australians to enjoy political representation and financial rights matching the Tasmanian benchmark at present. I'm open to suggestions on possible refinements to this plan and indeed all plans covered in my talk today.

Local Empowerment Plan

The Local Empowerment Plan seeks to elevate local government empowerment in Australia – constitutionally, legally, financially and generally – to the point where local government accounts for 15% to 20% or so of total government expenditure, akin to the Canadian system of government, with commensurate powers and responsibilities.

Conclusion

That's my talk, so over to you for questions and discussion about the Australia United Plan or related matters.

[The Australia United Plan follows on the next two pages]

Australia United:

A Unification Plan for Australia for the Period 2009 to 2020

as at 12 October 2009

I invite the honorable and learned member (Mr. Higgins) to consider this point: If the people of the smaller states are willing to adopt the type of government suggested by our Victorian friends, we can save the expense of ten Houses of Legislature and five Governors, and we can become a truly united people. But we have been sent here to frame a scheme of federation, not of amalgamation.

(Sir Richard Baker of South Australia, speaking at the Third Session of the National Australasian Convention, in Melbourne on 17 March 1898, as recorded on page 2482 of the official report)

The **Australia United** plan comprises objectives, outcomes and a five stage transition plan designed to achieve full Unification for Australia by the year 2020, as follows:

Reform Objectives

- **Unification (or amalgamation) of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to achieve a strong national government**
- **strengthened local governments**

Outcomes

- **financial benefits of about \$20 billion per annum in the public sector, \$40 billion per annum in the private sector, and at least \$50 billion (or about five per cent of GDP) across the Australian economy as a whole (in 2009 dollar terms)**
- **improved democracy and government at national and local levels**
- **no State or Territory governments**
- **a seamless national economy**
- **a seamless national approach to the environment**
- **a national education system**
- **a national health system**
- **a single set of laws for the whole of Australia as part of a national system of law, order and safety**
- **regional administration and cooperation not constrained by State and Territory borders**

Five Stage Transition Plan – to be reviewed on completion of each stage

Stage 1: Foundation Laying (~ 2009 to 2013)

- **local government strengthened by constitutional recognition, functional empowerment and increased funding from the Commonwealth government**
- **abolish State and Territory taxes**
- **ongoing efforts to establish national health, education and legal systems (such as the efforts to establish the national curriculum, national occupational health and safety laws, and national registration systems for businesses, tradespeople and professionals)**
- **explain to the public that financial benefits in the order of at least \$50 billion per annum in 2009 dollar terms, or about five per cent of GDP, can be achieved across the economy overall under a two-tier government structure comprising national and local governments, but no State and Territory governments**

Stage 2: Confirmation (~ 2013)

- referendum calling for the amalgamation of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to form a single national government under Commonwealth control, leaving local government and regional administration of government functions otherwise unchanged in the first instance

Stage 3: Preparation – After the Referendum at Stage 2 is Carried (~ 2013 to 2016)

- establish a single national set of laws and regulations across all fields, where such laws can host local variations where required for different geographic and climatic conditions (for building regulations, for example), and can be applied at the discretion of local governments, to achieve a seamless national economy and seamless national legal and environmental management systems
- establish fully national funding systems under Commonwealth control for education, health and other functions currently funded at least in part by State and Territory governments
- Commonwealth Grants Commission designs methodologies to provide Commonwealth funding direct to local governments rather than State and Territory governments

Stage 4: Unification Day (2016)

- Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments form a unified national government under Commonwealth control
- Courts previously operating in States and Territories become Commonwealth Courts
- Lands and assets of State and Territory governments are transferred to the Commonwealth
- Unification Transition Bureau is Formed
- State and Territory Parliamentarians have the choice to retire or become part of the Unification Transition Bureau for a maximum of four years
- all employees of State and Territory governments become employees of the Commonwealth government, including education and health sector employees and the police

Stage 5: Consolidation to Achieve Full Unification (2016 to 2020)

- rationalisation of former Commonwealth, State and Territory bureaucracies to achieve a single national government bureaucracy
- generous (all carrot, no stick) incentives and redundancy payout plans for surplus public servants
- transfer of financial and human resources from bureaucracy to local government, schools, hospitals and other "coalface" public service units
- refinement of boundaries used for regional administrative units so they no longer stop at State and Territory borders
- financial benefits amounting to approximately \$20 billion per annum in the public sector, \$40 billion per annum in the private sector, and at least \$50 billion per annum (or about five per cent of GDP) across the economy as a whole, are likely to be achieved from about 2020 onwards after the initial costs of transition more or less cancel out such benefits over the period 2016 to 2019

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