

The Big Picture

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"News to use & bemuse"

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Across the news

Recently I referred to a report that showed that Fed/State Labor has been spending excessively on 'public servants' while allowing critical infrastructures to degrade.

The worst state for this was Tasmania, and the [Examiner](#) recently published a breakdown of those expenses.

TASMANIA'S public sector numbers and wage costs have rocketed over the past decade, with almost 8000 more public servants than a decade ago and wage costs that have almost doubled.

Public servant numbers by head count have grown from 22,644 to 30,245 over the decade, or by 33 per cent, against a population increase of just 11 per cent.

The wages bill and other on-costs such as annual and long service leave have grown from \$1.32 billion in 2003-04 to \$2.23 billion in the current financial year.

In The Examiner...has calculated that had public sector wages kept pace with the economy from 2003 to 2004, \$1.68 billion would have been saved for other community uses over the next six years.

As the smallest state in the nation, Tasmania has one public servant per 16 Tasmanians, against a ratio in Victoria of approximately one public servant per 21 Victorians. In Queensland and NSW the ratio is approximately one public servant for every 19 people.

The increasing wage costs have also helped to drive up the public sector's superannuation gross unfunded liability. In 2003-04 the liability was about \$2 billion. Today it is about \$4.35 billion and by 2014 it is expected to total \$4.78 billion. The government has about \$1.6 billion set aside to meet these costs.

[Examiner](#)

Labor's strategy appears to be to try to compensate with the Labor party's bias (towards unions and general inexperience with business) by hiring more public servants and focussing on spin over substance. The result is to deprive the population of real assistance by spending too much on salaries and benefits.

THE State Government has admitted the program under which equipment is handed out to disabled Tasmanians is "failing". It follows a report in the Mercury this week about the parents of a severely disabled girl who were told to sell fundraising chocolates to pay for a new \$20,000 wheelchair for their daughter because the State Government did not have enough funds to help them.

[Mercury](#)

There is a hidden incentive for politicians in that their salaries & packages are generally tied to public service rates, so when public servant rates increase, politicians rates will follow.

The problem is not confined to Tasmania, Labor all over Australia appears unable to effectively run the public services.

A patient ran out of oxygen while waiting 30 minutes on a stretcher at Royal Melbourne on October 2, despite paramedics calling ahead to alert the hospital their patient had respiratory problems.

[TheAge](#)

At every level, the goals of Labor appear to be to spin the many developing problems in essential services out of the media, while burying their noses into the public trough as deeply as possible.

FEDERAL parliamentarians spent more than \$250,000 in six months on overseas study entitlements - including a luxury tour of the islands of Papua New Guinea on a yacht with a gym, spa, cinema and "stunning onyx cocktail bar".

New South Wales Liberal MP Bob Baldwin notched up a bill for \$28,498 on an eight-day trip to Papua New Guinea. Mr Baldwin took part in six meetings before spending five days on a luxury charter boat called the Seafaris (pictured).

The boat's website boasts it is a "top bracket luxury yacht", with a gymnasium, library and cinema, hydrotherapy spa, sun lounges, cocktail bar and "three exquisite dining areas".

In his report to Parliament, Mr Baldwin mentions observing scientific work on a coral reef system and providing medical aid to a local with malaria. It is unclear whether Mr Baldwin held meetings of relevance to his then defence portfolio.

[TheAge](#)

And we wonder why taxes are high in Australia!

The main political spin for the past few years has been that politicians, sitting in an air conditioned room and eating 5 star meals while quaffing champers, are somehow 'working hard' and 'making the tough decisions'.

Voters are starting to work out that politicians generally don't have to work very hard at all, and that spending other peoples' money is pretty easy really.

The US, now becoming infamous for its grotesquely large expenditures on difficult to justify wars, is a superb exemplar of wasting hard earned money.

FOR months, the secret talks unfolding between Taliban and Afghan leaders to end the war appeared to be showing promise, if only because of the repeated appearance of a certain insurgent leader at one end of the table: Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, one of the most senior commanders in the Taliban movement.

But now, it turns out, Mansour was apparently not Mansour at all. In an episode that could have been lifted from a spy novel, US and Afghan officials now say that the Afghan man was an impostor and that high-level discussions conducted with the assistance of NATO appear to have achieved little.

"It's not him," said a Western diplomat intimately involved in the discussions. "And we gave him a lot of money."

[Age](#)

So the much vaunted 'negotiations' were all a scam by another Afghani huckster.

Now Australia is getting in the act to sort out the corruption in Afghanistan, where recent 'democratic' elections were declared to contain millions of dodgy votes, all under the aegis of Hamid Karzai.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard has told Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai to stamp out the rampant corruption that has plagued the war-ravaged nation.

[TheAge](#)

That'll do it.

At least Victoria seems to be sending a message to Labor.

Good luck.

That Was The Week That Was

Governance + spin

Govt taxes & charges up to ½ of airline ticket costs [TheAge](#)
Tas finances in grim state [TasTimes](#)
More MP pay rises mooted [SMH](#) [Mercury](#)
Brumby's time is up [TheAge](#)
Greens offer something for everyone but who pays? [TheAge](#)

Food/forestry

Gunns axes workers [Mercury](#)
Chipping away at our forests [TheAge](#)

Climate/water/energy/resources/environment

Govt beckons mainland irrigators to Tas [Mercury](#)

Health & education revolutions/communication/defence

Bureaucrats pay rises as Vic hospitals fail patients [HeraldSun](#)
Vic hospitals turn away more ambulances [TheAge1](#) [TheAge2](#)
Indians write our uni papers for \$2 per 100 words [NewsLtd](#)

Economy/social/shelter/transport/free speech/World

Old bureaucrats cover up school asbestos hazard [CourierMail](#)
Victoria now a corporatist state: Davidson [TheAge](#)
We might follow leaders that we picked ourselves [ThePunch](#)
Permanently disabled must repeatedly prove disability [TheAge](#)
Coalition's losing ethics position [SMH](#)
WA to charge higher power prices for higher use [TheWest](#)
Treasury warns on house price bubble [Australian](#)
Bank profits equal ½ of total mortgage [Telegraph](#)

How Labor does business

THE collapse of a five-star resort project in the Yarra Valley has cost investors tens of millions of dollars and left the Brumby government embarrassed on the eve of the state election.

Documents obtained by [The Age](#) reveal that Premier John Brumby last year wrote to Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Michael Somare encouraging him to invest in the proposed Hilton in the Vines luxury resort, near Yarra Glen

In a letter to Mr Roux, Mr Brumby suggested that Tourism Victoria could be a source of help for his project. The tourism body subsequently provided a taxpayer-funded business analysis of the project to aid a council planning application.

With the 30-hectare property now in the hands of receivers and up for sale, Mr Roux has filed a bankruptcy application offering his creditors less than half a cent in the dollar.

On November 19, 2008, Mr Roux wrote a letter to Mr Brumby requesting help with the Hilton project. "The project will move forward with your government's help, and with a quick resolution to planning issues we would be able to commence construction by April of 2009," Mr Roux wrote.

Mr Brumby replied in January last year. "It is pleasing to hear that Stockwell Holdings is working with a number of members of parliament and government representatives to explore opportunities," he wrote.

"I encourage you to engage in early consultation with the Shire of Yarra Ranges and Department of Planning and Community Development to work through potential planning issues. Tourism Victoria could provide assistance to facilitate this process."

Government spokesman Luke Enright defended the involvement of Mr Brumby and Mr Holding, and said the government did not provide any financial support for the project.

Papal credibility

NO JOKE, every week I try, I really try, not to sneer unpleasantly at ludicrous religious beliefs but then, just when I think I have mastered it, this overwhelming urge to at least say something sane on a religious issue just gets the better of me.

And this week is a case in point. In a severely overpopulated world, beset by sexually transmittable diseases, including HIV, the Catholic Church has long stood firm against the most effective living-in-the-real-world solution – using condoms. Last week, however, for the first time, the Pope opined that, 'Well, maybe it might be OK for just male prostitutes to wear them.'

Look, I suppose this is a major step forward from a man – and he is just a man – who is previously on record saying condoms make the AIDS crisis worse. But all over the world, theologians are examining every which way the Pope's words, to try to determine their true meaning, and whether this is a formal change in Catholic policy.

Oh, people my people! How is it, that in the 21st century, five centuries or so on from the end of the Dark Ages, people can really care what the hell an elderly German man living in Rome – who is not only still a virgin, but also presiding over a growing international paedophilia scandal from within his own ranks – thinks about the use or otherwise of condoms? Why do otherwise rational and intelligent people think that he might know better than they do, most particularly when it comes to matters of the bleeding obvious? Is it because they are brainwashed from birth? Discuss. [SMH](#)