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Letters

We're declaring war on a most disabling Budget

As a person with multiple sclerosis who regularly works 14 hours per week, I see that if a review shows I can just do that extra hour per week I will no longer be considered disabled, I will just be underemployed. So if I get put onto New Start, the Government says I will get training so that I can work in a suitable job.

But I already work in a suitable job for my disability so they must have in mind some other sort of training to get me up to speed - weight training, maybe, for my muscle weakness, or endurance training so I don't fall asleep before I eat my dinner when I get home from work, or maybe bladder training so I don't take too many toilet breaks.

Now, if Peter Costello in his next Budget can just do the same for the aged pensioners and make "aged", say, 72, we won't have an aging problem.

And we thought we'd need stem cells!

D.E. Clancy, Annandale, May 17.

The Government has decided that patrolling for asylum seekers is part of "environmental expenditure" and feeding asylum seekers on Nauru is "foreign aid" (*Herald*, May 16). It seems that economic definitions are increasingly flexible.

Presumably, then, it is now possible for me to claim tax deductions for drinking imported Mexican beer (a charitable donation to the people of that land) and for my expensive holiday in Fiji (my generosity to our Pacific neighbours knows no bounds). Then there are the work-related massage parlour expenses (despite the Fiji holiday I'm too stressed to work effectively) and the GST-free car I can buy because of my disability (I'm too cool to drive anything but a luxury sedan). Thank you, Peter Costello.

John Kennedy, Tamworth, May 16.

Did anyone hear the words "knowledge", "learning" or "public education" uttered on Budget night as the Howard Government plans our future, or did I miss something? Perhaps the plan is to close our minds as well as our

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Columns

borders.

Joanne Jarvis, Heathcote, May 17.

It has been alleged that the Budget allocates too much funding for "wartime" expenses and not enough for areas such as education. However, I recently heard that "war is God's way of teaching Americans geography". Well done, Mr Howard, two birds with one stone.

Marise Watson, Newtown, May 17.

The Budget proposals on the disability pension have produced howls of protest. But they should be no surprise. Muddled policies over the past decade have failed to improve the employment levels of people with disabilities.

Even the Government employs fewer people with disabilities. Tokenism still characterises policies in this area. We still find it easier to blame the disabled for their low employment levels than face up to discrimination, lack of access and inflexibilities at the workplace.

The stories being flushed out by this policy fiasco demonstrate the struggles and courage of people with disabilities as they seek to work. They deserve our support, not pickpocket policies.

Graeme W. Smith, Executive Director, Ability Research Centre, Sydney, May 17.

You have to think that Peter Costello has been on another planet preparing his Budget.

In the past month, politicians have been trying to limit the amount of compensation people can claim for injuries. In comes Costello saying that he can help the country by making disability pensions harder to get and force recipients back into the workforce.

He has not explained how employers are going to get workers' compensation cover for employees with pre-existing back injuries. And what happens if the workload does exacerbate an existing injury? Somehow these poor souls get the idea they cannot rely on governments to care for them. It is no wonder they litigate.

Patrick Ryan, Redfern, May 17.

The Howard Government won't be happy until it has people like Stephen Hawking flipping burgers at McDonald's.

D. McMahon, East Sydney, May 15.

We are reliably (and frequently) reminded how fortunate we are to live in a country that is the economic envy of the entire world.

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Low inflation, high growth, a booming housing sector, enormous executive salaries and massive company profits, a veritable cornucopia of riches. And yet at the sight of our first teeny little Budget deficit, the only citizens who are asked to make a contribution are our sick and our underprivileged. All part of the Howard-Costello doctrine: "Ask not what you can do for your needy, ask what they can do for you."

Norm Christenson, Thornleigh, May 16.

As I watched John Howard on the *The 7:30 Report* he made the claim that increasing the cost of prescriptions would encourage people to change their lifestyle to be less dependent on drugs.

I, too, would like to be less dependent on my drug to prevent blood clots, eye drops against glaucoma and tablets to control heart irregularities.

But as I already walk a lot and exercise regularly, eat healthily and gave up smoking a long time ago, I am at a loss to know what changes I am supposed to make to my lifestyle. Perhaps watching less of John Howard and his team of spinmeisters would reduce my stress level.

On the other hand, if Dr John has some expert knowledge unknown to my doctors, perhaps he could pass it on to them.

Norman Rich, Newport, May 16.

How about a war on the terror of being a sick or disabled Australian?

Jen Jacobs, Mullumbimby, May 17.

Principals rally against human injustice

The Association of Catholic School Principals Inc (in NSW and ACT) represents more than 600 Catholic school principals.

Its members wish to place on the public record our abhorrence at the treatment of asylum seekers in this country. The processes of internal and off-shore detention place us in breach of our commitments to the United Nations and our fundamental obligations to human rights - particularly those of children.

The practices in place are racist, unjust and lacking in compassion. As Catholic educators, we deplore the consequences of current policies, not only for those in detention but for the nation as a whole.

Br Ambrose Payne, President, Association of Catholic

School Principals Inc (in NSW and ACT), Bankstown, May 18.

Philip Ruddock (Letters, May 17) says it is "pre-emptive to assume that all those on board are refugees". I suppose that means it would also be pre-emptive to label them all illegal and claim they were tossing children overboard. For some reason I keep thinking of pots and kettles, glass houses and stones.

Sophie J. Kunze, Nepean, May 17.

In response to Mr Ruddock's reminder that we should not presume all of the Tampa rescued were genuine refugees: we know that more than 90 per cent were found to be refugees. Most are living freely in New Zealand. I think the salutary lesson we learnt from that tragedy was that not all politicians are genuine human beings.

Debby O'Brien, Armidale, May 17.

Solution: hand it over

Rather than require the government-owned ambulance service to spend real money from the sale of ambulance stations to buy the Paddington station from the government-owned Defence Department ("Protests as ambulance stations sold", *Herald*, May 16), there is an alternative.

Could the two ministers responsible please get together, in recognition that this is a publicly owned asset anyway, and simply transfer it from one asset register to another. No money required. Yes, ministers?

Craig Leventhal, Neutral Bay, May 16.

A lesson in schooling

The views of Rodney Molesworth on the federal Budget regarding schooling ("Nelson's caring clothes threadbare after Budget's education let-down", *Herald*, May 16) need to be clarified.

The Commonwealth has not provided any new real increases in funding to students attending non-government schools. The funding changes are due to the continuing shift of students to non-government schools (now over 31 per cent) and the annual indexation mechanisms applied to both school sectors.

It is misleading and mischievous to present per capita funding data from the Commonwealth source alone and to ignore that around 82 per cent of the school budgets of the states is allocated to government schooling.

Parents of non-government-school students are also most disappointed that this federal Budget did not provide more

for the needs of students with disabilities and those with learning difficulties.

Quality schooling outcomes for every child is an investment in our future.

Duncan McInnes, Executive Officer, NSW Parents Council, Crows Nest, May 17.

Having worked in and supported the state system of education for 42 years, including 14 years as a high school principal, I have been philosophically opposed to private schools.

However, questions need to be asked and answered: what is the estimated cost per student per year in the state system? What is the estimated cost per subsidy per student in the private system? How would the state system cope if all private schools ceased to exist?

I suggest if these questions are answered correctly, it would be obvious that the current system of subsidy is saving government and taxpayers considerable money, despite the vocal criticism now existing.

C.A.S. Longworth, Tathra, May 17.

Building on shaky ground

Nick Kirk, the general manager of Royal & Sun Alliance, states with regard to home owners' warranty "we will concentrate on the financial strength of builders ... That will be a big plus for a well-run, well-capitalised builder operating a profitable and successful business" ("Sun shines on home front as insurer eases claims on builders", *Herald*, May 16). What he doesn't say is that it will, by implication, be a big negative for any builder that in his judgement is undercapitalised.

I have been through this a number of times with HIH and Dexta. The process is inherently flawed and the time taken to do it is a disgrace.

Being told by my insurance company what my capitalisation should be, turnover can be, and what size contract I can do is a recipe for great difficulty.

Mr Carr should take personal control of this situation.

David FitzSimons, Killara, May 16.

Pressing the bench

John Brogden's idea of sending his ministers out into the real world is to be commended ("Just John' promises a front-line front bench", *Herald*, May 17). Instead of one day a quarter, how about one straight week a year?

Even better, why don't you get your colleagues to catch public transport to Macquarie Street every day? I bet they'll find out more about the problems ordinary citizens face this way, rather than doing work experience four days a year.

Nik Bencsik, Hunters Hill, May 17.

Getting to the bottom of a legal dilemma

Having been a keen bodysurfer for more than 50 years and in the habit of catching waves just outside the flagged area to avoid colliding with bathers, I now have to obey the lifeguards and move back between the flags. I would like to know who to sue when I next rick my neck (or worse) after colliding with a lady who has turned and placed her ample rear directly in the path of the wave carrying me. Do I sue the lifeguards who have endangered my safety or the lady for having a big backside? Decisions, decisions.

Alec Noble, Tamworth, May 17.

Crean's gobful

Simon Crean's getting his new teeth into things. Let's hope he hasn't bitten off more than he can chew!

Jan McCauley, Bowral, May 17.

K.B. Orr suggests churches should "stop worshipping a book" and for good measure throws in an accusation of "bibliolatory " (Letters, May 17). We often hear of mythical Christians who worship the Bible but it is hard to find one in real life. Christians read the Bible to help them know and worship God. By all means point out the failings of churches and Christians, but don't invent ones.

David Morrison, Springwood, May 17.

Voting online

For many a year I have observed how ridiculous our method of voting is. Why not enrol to vote at a TAB and place your vote via a computer terminal. Think of all the money we could save in vote checking. Results could be stored all day and released at the press of a button when polling is finished. Too easy?

Robert Rinn, Dover Heights, May 17.

South Sydney bunnies

I do not question George Piggins's commitment to the community of South Sydney and his commendable efforts to

bring better facilities to the less privileged residents of Waterloo-Redfern through his football club (Letters, May 17). However, I must remind him that the council boundary reform process was initiated by the lobbying of dissatisfied South Sydney residents sick of growing crime rates, delays in their development applications, dirty streets and unkempt parks. South Sydney Council might be looking after the Rabbits but they are treating residents like bunnies.

Frank Sartor, Lord Mayor of Sydney, Sydney, May 17.

It might not be the border protection policy the Government intended but well done, South Sydney Council.

D. Davie, Annandale, May 17.

The new 'outback'

A zoo for Darling Harbour (*Herald*, May 17). Next we'll have Sydney concierges pointing to this lifeless precinct when tourists ask for directions to the "outback". I suppose technically it is out the back of the city and it's certainly west of the CBD.

Christopher Thomas, Belrose, May 17.

All that glitters is not necessarily golden, darling

As a gay male I couldn't agree more with Jon Casimir ("Sydney is not the sum of its gays", *Herald*, May 17).

For those flapping their arms about in horror at his suggestion that gay men have no style, no taste and no dance moves, just pop into one of the many venues up and down Oxford Street - Stonewall would be a good start - where Geri Halliwell's *It's Raining Men* reigns supreme on the dance floor and sparkly vinyl pants are still considered fashionable, and see for yourself.

Darren Lovell, Paddington, May 17.

How lucky we all are in Sydney to have our gay folks applying such style and panache to our tired city. This is, of course, most apparent at Mardi Gras time when we are all treated to a long parade of posers in undies and green lurex.

Such style, such panache ...

S. Mayn, Balgowlah Heights, May 17.

Thanks, Jon Casimir, for highlighting the terrible plight most gays in Sydney have to endure as we strive every day of our lives to live up to the new stereotype: well-groomed and expensively dressed with gym body, financially successful,

night-clubbing, vodka-swilling, Botox-pumped, flower-purchasing, coupe-driving, pet-owning etc. Only those women doubling as super-mums and corporate executives would have any idea what we have to go through.

Like every subculture or potential buyer group, the long arms of capitalism eventually got to us. What was once a struggle for sexual liberation (or polymorphous perversity, as it was originally known) has been turned, with quite a bit of help from ourselves, into a polymorphous spending machine.

Gay liberation has had its day. We go backwards from here. In fact we have been doing so for some time.

James Waites, Rosebery, May 17.

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