

Poll Position

Katharine Murphy

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In conversation with

Ebony Bennett

Deputy Director at the Australia Institute

Ebony Bennett [00:00:03] Good, everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute and welcome to pole position our fortnightly catch up where we take a deep dive into the latest Guardian Essential Poll Results. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I live and work on Ngunnawal and Ngambri country and pay my respects to elders past and present. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land and sovereignty was never stated. And of course we're all in the middle of a big discussion about a voice to Parliament that we're going to take to a referendum next year. And I believe we've got some polling results that we'll dig into a little bit later as well. Just a few tips before we get going to help things run smoothly today. Just a reminder to put questions for the panel in the chat. You should also be able to upvote other people's questions and make comments on them as well. A reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat. And lastly, a reminder that this discussion is being recorded, goes up on our YouTube channel later this afternoon and Guardian Australia turns it into a podcast as well, which normally Katherine and Pete and I promote the day after. So we'll let you know on Twitter when that comes out as well. So it's the end of the first sitting fortnight of Parliament and it's been a very big beginning to the next Parliament, a very different make up of the Parliamentary benches, much smaller Coalition benches, much bigger crossbench and some really big issues on the table, not only the cost of living crisis and an economic statement from the Treasurer, but also as we mentioned, we've got the voice to Parliament with the Prime Minister releasing some kind of draught wording to help shape that national debate as well as the climate legislation, which I'm sure will be very keen to get stuck into. I'm coming to you from home because I've got COVID. Unfortunately, funding finally caught up with me, but I'm feeling a lot better today, so thanks for bearing with me and my what sounds just like a cold now. Feeling much better and. Yeah, Katherine, I'll head on over to you. It feels like feels like real change in the air in parliament. I don't know if he felt that after that first couple.

Katharine Murphy [00:02:28] Yeah, I did. First of all, praise our soldier Ebony, who is showing up despite the COVID. Hats off. And thank you for thank you for facilitating when you must feel like hell. So thank you for that. In terms of change in the air. Yeah, yeah. Like, you know, there's that attached change. The change the government changed the country but I don't know having I haven't been to all the far reaches of Australia in the last 5 minutes, so I can't tell you whether the whole country has comprehensively changed. But certainly the, the, the temper and tenor and tone of politics in

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Canberra has changed and there has been a sort of explosion of activity obviously with a new government in town, every, you know, every member of civil society, every interest group, you know, big from big business right through to, you know, not for profits. Everybody's here and and trying to engage the new government and sort of get a fix on the new government. And these guys are moving fast. You know, that's the other thing to say the first couple of sitting weeks we saw, as it mentioned, the passage through the lower house of the government's climate targets legislation. We also saw legislation introduced covering aged care and domestic and family violence, slave and all kinds of stuff. And this bill. Yes, indeed. So they're moving apace. And and I think they want to convey that sense of movement that there's there has been a change. You know, there's a there's a programme and an agenda. And they want to sort of stop moving through that quickly because I think it's the thing about progressive government. So I always feel on the clock, you know, it's sort of because Labour is not the natural party of government at the federal level. That's, you know, what, what history and statistics show us a big Labour government always rising and start going because you never know quite how long you're going to be there for. But that said, I think they are moving at a manageable pace. There's been no sort of, you know, massive screw ups at this point in time or, you know, right hand. Not talking to the left hand, very obviously. Obviously, we've got to see how they've been down, but it's certainly been a really interesting couple of weeks.

Ebony Bennett [00:05:01] Certainly has. I mean, I feel like, as you said, there's been a lot of the agenda. But poor old Murray, what seems to be an extremely damaging miss by biosecurity threats and natural disasters, he's really had to hit the ground running. I just mention that because I saw that the biosecurity kind of strategy document and it's not like there's not a lot to contend with on that front.

Katharine Murphy [00:05:26] And I know. I know. And it's sort of I think with Murray Watt too I think those folks on on the call with us today or on the show with this today will have a reasonable sense of who Murray is. But he's like a tractor in low gear. He's a very relentless character. And I think it was sort of a point of pride really over the last couple of years in particular, where he's sort of taken the taking the politics up to up to the Morrison government very hard. So I think I think he's worn a little bit of the blowback in relation to that. I think the you know, the sort of I think stories in his portfolio, I think there's a lot of coalition people that are intensely irritated by Murray Watts relentlessness. And as you say, he's been a very busy beaver with all these moving parts. And as we're here together on the show today, he's actually talking to the National Press Club. So, yeah, well.

Ebony Bennett [00:06:22] They go pay before we kind of get into the slides, I wondered if I could ask you, what are some of the things that we're going to look at today in the in the polling and that you've noticed in these first couple of weeks of the new parliament?

Peter Lewis [00:06:38] Yeah. Thanks, David. Hi, everyone. We do have a look at the attitudes to voice, given that the Prime Minister's articulation of the proposition at Garma a couple of weeks ago, but also looking at some of the responses to a number of the economic challenges the

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Government is facing. I don't think it's quite up yet, but the column I've got going up in The Guardian today sort of looks at the backdrop to the new parliament being the cacophony of a world in turmoil, you know, missiles being fired up off of Taiwan, the war in the Ukraine, a global pandemic, climate catastrophe. It's at a moment when I think that the notion of a global village is really breaking down. Labour comes to power as nations around the world try to redefine what a nation actually is. I think, you know, you look at, for instance, the Ukraine, where a sense of nationhood is a vital tool in protecting the nation. You look at Australia and after the last sort of particularly the last term of the Government where Morrison managed to alienate everyone from the French to the post-Trump US administration to Pacific neighbours like who didn't get offended. Now Labour's trying to rebuild. What a sense of nationhood looks like. So my column posits that there are certain things, particularly around economy, which, you know, you can't do a lot. You, you can kind of duck and cover as the world goes into, you know, energy shortages and, you know, inflationary spirals. But what you can do is define yourself as a nation on the global stage. And I think the passing of the the targets on climate is almost like the necessary first step into entering global society again. And maybe the second part is getting dealing with our history so that we can move forward via the voice. So hopefully that'll be up in a little while. But I don't know. I've tried to throw a few questions in there to illustrate some of those things as well.

Ebony Bennett [00:09:04] Yeah. So Peter, if we dive in now to this first slide, do you want to take us through what's happening with the does?

Peter Lewis [00:09:15] It's not like there's been any catastrophic fall, but it's probably off the high. I think Newspoll had it at 61 the other day. We had after the election 59 narrowing a little bit. But you know, there's solid leadership numbers post honeymoon, also a bit of a narrowing in that kind of right track, wrong track, which is kind of one of our little lead stars on how people see the nation as opposed to the government is heading. And of course, what's driving that is cost of living at the moment. I think we've got another slide there just showing how well before we get there, we put a number of propositions about the performance of the Albanese Government today, so people think they're focussed on the things that really matter, getting things done. As Catherine was saying, they are moving, addressing long term problems and they're all above the 50%, although not overwhelmingly. And I might add that these are fourth choices. So we do let people say, I don't know, they're all net positive, but it's back into that kind of narrow territory of, you know, mid-fifties, mid-forties, isn't it? I do one more slide before we maybe sort of cop forever, which is the cost of living. So we've got 84% of people saying that they are concerned about the current rate of inflation and the impact this is having on the cost of living. And that really does link into, if you're a member of fortnight ago, people self describing their economic situation with more than half people saying they're either struggling or just managing to hang on. So one more data point again from a fortnight ago. People do say the government having control over these economic levers, even though in reality I think there is a fair bit of hidden hope going on.

Ebony Bennett [00:11:10] Yeah. Catherine, did you want to respond to that? I know the Treasurer is kind of been very open about the headwinds. The economy is facing the situation. But I'm kind of still waiting to hear a little bit more detail ahead of the budget about what some of those specific

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inflation fighting measures might look like. And of course we've got the review of the RBA coming up as well.

Katharine Murphy [00:11:36] A lot of a lot of moving parts there and obviously there's a very difficult set of conditions for the Government to manage and it'll be, I think, drawing on all of that initial goodwill that that we can see in the polling numbers in order to navigate the, you know, the sort of next next 6 to 6 to 12 to 18 months really before conditions are forecast to moderate. So, look, I think it is it is, you know, even referred to the polling from a fortnight ago. In the fortnight before that, we saw that if there was one area where people were, you know, where there was a sort of a building, a building current of impatience or dissatisfaction was with the sort of response to cost of living measures or cost of living threats challenges. Right. So what I'm saying is that this is genuinely really difficult territory for the government to navigate because, you know, this government came to power on a platform of, you know, ending wages stagnation. Well, that's not going to happen. Now because you can't end wages stagnation when inflation is running at 8%. So there's that. There's mentioned there's obviously the Reserve Bank and we're still in a cycle of rising interest rates which obviously in flight borrowing costs for consumers like it's a really nasty set of crosswinds at the moment. And and also, we're sort of we've still got all that sort of overhang associated with the pandemic as well. So we've got high petrol prices. I think I've been saying on the show in the past, God knows how they're going to end this fuel excise, the temporary cut in fuel excise. And we've got a question on that in in this week's polling, which suggests that that will be really quite difficult. So look, I mean, the Government's setting up a budget, you know, to start as it needs to continue. It wants to sort of keep on with its own agenda as well as dealing with, you know, the sort of the stuff that will wash through the cycle at this point in time. But yeah, I do think it's yeah, I do think it is a really difficult set of conditions. And interestingly, on The Guardian this morning, if you guys have been over to the site and had a look, there's some new polling out of New Zealand that's looking pretty bad for Jacinda Ardern there as well. Now obviously she's an incumbent. She doesn't have that sort of upswing of goodwill that a new, a newly elected government has in Australia. But the sort of analysis around that polling indicating that she's in a bit of strife suggests that a lot of that is attributable to New Zealanders frustration with high inflation and high cost of living. So, you know, it's tricky and the capacity for governments to really materially alter people's sort of lived reality at the moment is, is slim. So yeah, it's going to be it's going to be a lively, you know, somewhere between six and eight months, I think.

Ebony Bennett [00:14:46] I'm just coming back to the polling place if we go now.

Peter Lewis [00:14:51] Oh yeah. That doesn't quite work out the way we like on that. Oh we go back in again. I think it should go. Okay, go forward. Let's let, let's, let's force our way through there. I think there's just a little bit of a format error on your version of the PowerPoint apologies, folks. And if you are listening to the podcast, the slides mean nothing but you can get on our website central report dot com dot I you.

Katharine Murphy [00:15:17] Do that.

Peter Lewis [00:15:17] Play at home so we're looking at support for federal government measures Catherine had been for a number of weeks saying to me, what do people think about the fuel excise set up to keep it? 60% strongly support or somewhat support the proposition to extend the fuel excise cut beyond September. That's obviously very expensive and the Government's going to avoid that if they can, because amongst all the things that people expect of the government, including making good their election promises on funding, early learning funding, aged care funding, the the transition to renewables, funding the NDIS. They also want to reduce government debt of course, and this is the needle the Government needs to find a way through. So that one, there is no real, you know, enthusiasm for the other two. And again, sorry, folks that are watching the screen on a distorted PowerPoint, increasing the rate of jobseeker payment for people who are unemployed. There's 44% support for that, 27% opposition and a lot in the middle. And then of course the other one and Catherine, I really struggled on how to explain this in a way that didn't drive a particular outcome, but to delay the stage three income tax cuts, which predominantly benefit higher income earners. But the problem we face is that that kick in initially at 40,000. So it's tax cuts to 40000 to 200000, although the the benefits of those at the higher end because we're effectively flattening the tax rate are much more pronounced. Look, there is support 4225 against but not a clamouring that we give you the sense that there's a lot of political cover to delay that. And I guess that would be the one act you could take to really put the fray up funds for other things that are urgently needed or deal with the budget deficit. But, you know, I think given the theory of Government that Albanese and Labour bought in, which is we would take a fairly defined set of measures to the electorate, we would get in power and then stick to the those issues. I can't see that happening, although, you know, maybe if things get hotter and hotter that what is that, \$100 billion. On the table, not 100 billion. But what's the number, Catherine?

Ebony Bennett [00:17:50] It's like 184 billion for the income tax. Stage three.

Peter Lewis [00:17:55] Yes. So there's it's not insignificant. I don't know.

Ebony Bennett [00:18:02] Pay lot.

Peter Lewis [00:18:03] Difficulty. So we've moved to voice.

Ebony Bennett [00:18:05] Yeah. I just wanted to get onto this one because I think, you know, we've got a long way to go with both the economic debate and this one. But I feel like voice has really been kind of a key priority for the Prime Minister. And now we've got this draught wording out. There's now a long campaign until the actual referendum.

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Peter Lewis [00:18:28] Very interesting is not a bad starting point. 6535 in my head you've got to get to 7525 almost where you are with movement on climate to be really confident but. There is a solid base to build off. A second question we ask, though, says that a lot of those people that support it don't really know much about it nor understand it at the moment. And I think the challenge is going to be to build the awareness. So you've only got a third of the population knowing anything more than hardly anything about a proposition that's likely to go before the people midway through next year. The danger there is it opens up a lot of space for a negative campaign focussed on scaremongering. I reckon there's probably three critical things that need to play out. The first is obviously a high degree of consensus amongst First Nations people on the voice proposition that goes to Parliament. The second is the role the Libs play and whether they. Let's go. They say political advantage in standing in the way of this reform or they form a consensus which would lay Pauline Hanson as effectively the no campaign. But I think the most critical challenge is just to explain. Not just war and the war, but also the modest nature of the constitutional question. So this is not, as Megan Davis eloquently put it, in the Saturday paper over the weekend. This is not like the republic where there's a fully formed model to be debated over as part of the referendum. It is really just the start of that process. So the analogy I'm thinking through at the moment is if the statement from the heart was an invitation to Australia to make peace with our history, then the constitutional changes, the RSVP, it's accepting the invitation and then putting it on our legislature to come up with effective models that may change over time. The danger we fall into is a theory and Catherine, that I know that the the gallery even around Garma was very quick to saying, but what is it? How is it going to work? What's it going to look like? And that to me seems to be the biggest barrier to finding a way through because it's actually defining the wrong question. The the constitutional trigger is purely to say there will be a voice will be heard. And then it's up to our elected reps working with First Nations people to actually flesh out that body. And I think where there has been friction already that it's been around that. So I don't know, like if we can run a campaign on whether we accept an RSVP to an invitation to make peace with our history. I think it's winnable, but there's still a long way to go.

Ebony Bennett [00:21:28] Yeah. Katherine The early polling results of says are encouraging, but of course these propositions are always difficult. What is your sense of how the coalition is going to treat this?

Katharine Murphy [00:21:45] Well, there's still at the table, which is an encouraging sign. Julian Lazar, who is the shadow attorney general and a an avowed supporter of constitutional recognition. In terms of the voice proposal, that's a good start. He's been on board supporting this proposal for quite a long time. And he went to Garma with the with the prime minister, which is a gesture. Obviously, the leader didn't go, but the shadow did. In terms of, though, I think this is a really difficult issue for the coalition party room. One of the reasons that we've been talking about this for two decades or variants of it, obviously Hillary statement was was 2017. But this whole idea, as Pete puts it, of having a reckoning with our history, an institutional reckoning with our history. We've been, you know, hoeing this road for several decades, how we do this. Part of the reason that it sort of hasn't progressed is because, you know, because the coalition party room would probably not favour this, as, you know, as a landing point. There's sort of a spectrum of views between people who are really conservative about the Constitution and, you know, people who sort of, you know, prefer, well, you know, Dutton sort of encapsulates these points about, you know, oh, no, not more

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symbolism, my word. You know, what we need is practical things as if the two is somehow mutually exclusive. But anyway, all of that sort of noise in the public space just sort of underscores the fact that it is it will be very difficult to get a coalition party room consensus around the idea of the voice. Folks on the show this week may remember that Scott Morrison kind of ride this out relatively hard as well during his prime ministership. You know, sort of had Ken White out there and, you know, things were all about to move along. And then things, you know, the brake was applied very substantially to the pace of that. And that in part reflects, you know, a lack of unanimity in the coalition party room about these propositions. So Luke, has the story going to end? I don't know yet, but I do think that Peter Dutton, in terms of the early sorties, has created space for this, for this conversation to occur. And Liza is definitely an avowed supporter. What we've heard out of the coalition to date has been let's not rush this, let's just, you know, don't go too fast. Do you know which is really, you know, again, a measure of the difficulty of navigating these through the coalition party room rather than, you know, this is a new concept that we shouldn't just thrust on the Australian people. So look, it's hard to predict. I think honestly I think there would be a number of people whose, if we can put it this way, who would, who would, whose heart would be in the right place about this but whether or not and landed open. Question Then you've got the proposition of the Prime Minister. What does the Prime Minister do right in the event that there's not a bipartisan position ahead of the referendum? What does the Prime Minister do? Because obviously that increases the degree of difficulty. So, I mean, you haven't even asked me this, but let's speculate just for a minute. Right. What does the prime minister do if that's the situation he finds himself in? Well, it's very important to this prime minister personally that we have a, you know, a genuine crack at this, that we try and get this done. This is something that he he believes in very profoundly. And I think anybody watching him over the last couple of weeks will have seen that. So, you know, I don't I don't think, you know, the prime minister suddenly, you know, steps back from the fray, unless there is a view amongst the indigenous leadership that, you know, I bet it's better to step away from this than say it file. Right. So all that to play out. But I think what the Prime Minister is trying to do is make this a personal priority so that Australians can see that the Prime Minister supports it. Obviously get important Indigenous voices out there. People are not going to agree. There's going to be a spectrum of the issues. So I think people have got to get used to this being a debate where everybody doesn't agree. And then I think if you, the prime minister, and you still steaming ahead trying to get this referendum out, what you do then is you go to the premiers because a number of the premiers are supportive of this, you know, and other sort of, you know, even more advanced. Positions in terms of a settlement about the history. So you engage the premise. I think you engage as much of corporate Australia as that is prepared to come on board endorsing this proposal and the full weight of civil society.

Peter Lewis [00:26:41] You're right, and that's the vibe. It's the AFL and the rugby league and celebrating the music of our Indigenous people and bringing it together in a way that it's not a technocratic discussion about. Designs of. You know, mechanisms.

Katharine Murphy [00:27:03] Yes, it.

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Peter Lewis [00:27:04] Is the RSVP to the invitation. And that's a lot harder for the leaves to stand in front of. Like did I say, no, we don't accept the invitation because we don't know what the party's going to be like. Come to the party and let's make it work. I think that I I'm not sure that lands, but I think it's I think if we end up in a fight over models, it's cactus.

Katharine Murphy [00:27:25] Well, but but it's sort of like that that exactly is within the two of us have been spitballing about that's exactly the process the prime minister is trying to set up. You know, just RSVP to the to the invitations. We'll work out the details later, just accept the principle of it and enjoin as many voices in the public arena as he possibly can to try and deliver this cause. Because we have a prime minister who is at this point unsure whether or not he will this will be a bipartisan position. So very obvious what he's setting up. I do think, though, that this that it is a bit naive to expect that, you know, that Australians, particularly given where our polling is this week, that a number of them know that they like it as a concept but they don't really know what it's about. I think it's a bit naive to think that somehow we can avoid the try before you by a proposition playing out in a referendum that we can somehow skied across the the date I oh here I just don't think that's how it works to the extent that there will be voices out there weaponizing various proposals which you know, which no one's agreed to, which will then sort of pull the Prime Minister into rebuttal territory, which is not where you want to be. So, I mean, I don't want to be, you know, Daisy Downer here in this conversation at all. I think.

Peter Lewis [00:28:50] That wouldn't be like.

Katharine Murphy [00:28:50] Here. Well, you know, natural pessimist who brings her along. No, seriously, this is as Pete says, I completely agree with you, Diagnostique. This is a good place to be in. This is a really good place to be at the start of this campaign, because there is this sort of positive and positive sentiment around it out there. And as Pete said to all of us, there is there's a wedge there. If the leaves are going to go full Tony Abbott on is well that's quite risky for them to this is downside risks there so I bet it was.

Peter Lewis [00:29:23] Interesting in that vote a breakdown like amongst coalition voters it's 5347 support Labour at 7723 Greens it's 8190 and then minor parties independents which used to be the preserve of the old right and the one nations but now also includes tail. So we need to sort of probably change that a bit. It's 5644, so all of Labour's a vote on net positive. But of course the, the no vote doesn't need a majority to poison the water.

Katharine Murphy [00:30:01] Yeah. Structural things with referenda that are really hard, you know, it's hard to get success which is, you know, anyway, that's a truism and a statement of the obvious. I think we're seeing the same thing.

Peter Lewis [00:30:11] Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, we're not fighting the fight.

Katharine Murphy [00:30:14] I mean, it's entertaining when we do, but I think as a figure, our assessment is similar. And but and I understand the Prime Minister doesn't want to bog down in detail because then there's conflict all the way. Right. And the more conflict this is, the more difficult it is. But I just I just don't know that that's a world.

Peter Lewis [00:30:30] But I just think on that detail pace, part of it is driven by the need to continually be from the gallery scrutinising propositions. But. Can that be isolated? The the actual detail. If the detail of the proposition is put in the Constitution, then all the negative campaigning saying we're creating new houses and new lines of authority is accurate. You've actually got to keep it out of the Constitution. You also need to have a model that's resilient enough to change over time. Because if this lands in 100 years, what a voice looks like could be very different to what a voice looks like now. So it's just whether we are mature enough to have a conversation about a broad principle and then allow the process to define what that is. Maybe continued contiguous, but not. That's not what we're going to be voting on.

Ebony Bennett [00:31:29] Yeah, I'm and for I can say we've got about 630 people on the line with us today. Thank you for joining us. And if you are interested in voice, what the voice to Parliament will look like, what the process for coming together for the old restatement from the heart was because there was a huge number of regional dialogues that happened with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities all around Australia. You can go on to our website at Australia Institute called The Review or onto our YouTube channel and see the webinar we did last week with the Uluru Statement from the Heart, winners of the Sydney Peace Prize for 2020 122. We spoke to Professor Megan Davis and Pat Anderson, two of the architects of the Uluru Statement From the Heart. These are women that have kind of been at the forefront of leading this movement and designing it to incorporate all kinds of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities whose voices are normally not heard. And to talk about a lot of the work that has been done already for what some of that detail might look like. So I recommend people and check that out as well as that Saturday paper article that Pete was talking about. There is a lot of information around there, but as we were saying, it's a good spot to be in public is with yes at the moment. And we just kind of have to keep that momentum going ahead of the the referendum, which is obviously the challenge. But that does make me think of the plebiscite, which although damaging, you know, that was a very positive campaign for marriage equality that happened. And I hope it ends now that, you know, with that positive result again at the end of this process. I'm Katherine. I want to come back to you. Now, we've I guess, back to the climate we've touched on that the fact that the legislation has passed through the House of Representatives. But I think we've also seen some kind of sensible amendments. The idea that Labour won't jump put a moratorium on new coal mines as part of this climate legislation, but potentially if there's a climate trigger in an APC type reform scenario, you know, this obviously Labour now has to achieve that target. So it needs to you know, there's plenty more climate legislation, I guess, that will come down the barrel following this kind of establishing of where we're all headed. Yes, they could be encouraged by kind of how the parliament has dealt with this so far.

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Katharine Murphy [00:34:02] Oh, yeah. Oh, what a relief. My God, I was. Yes, always. Well, talk about the natural pessimism. Did you know I was quite concerned that something absolutely sort of dreadful would happen again? Unfortunately, it did not. Although we need to be, we should we should be clear that David Pocock, who's the ACTU independent senator, hasn't yet sort of look, he's sounding extremely positive about this legislation when it hits the Senate. I'd be amazed if he scuttled, like seriously amazed, gobsmacked. But he is yet to articulate his his full wish list in order to support this. Once it gets to the the house upstairs, once it gets to the red room, what happens to it? They're just just for clarity. We just need to say that it's not quite sorted yet. But your point is the right one. If this is this is you know, there was a lot of energy expended. You don't want me to sleep in trying to nail this legislation because it was important. It was it was a step. It meant that the country had moved forward right after that kind of abject, immoral debacle of the last decade. Right. So it's very important in that sense. And it also sets up some procedures that are important, like, you know, if you're going to have a target legislated, if you're going to have, you know, 2030 legislated, if you're going to have a 2050 target, legislate that, too. So everybody understands, you know, the rules of the road where where we're trying to get to. It also sets up some accountability mechanisms which are. The deals, the Climate Change Authority back into the expert advice predicated on climate science. That information needs to be sought and tabled in the end. The Responsible Minister needs to respond in the event that he is not conforming with it. So all of these things are important, but what lies ahead is sort of in practical terms, the most important of all this is the overhauling of the safe guard mechanism, which is coming up over the next little bit as it passes the issue of whether or not we fix the broken environment laws and and actually make an assessment of the climate impacts of new developments part of the system it's not currently.

Ebony Bennett [00:36:23] I mean that I just find that shocking.

Katharine Murphy [00:36:25] It's it's bizarre, isn't it? I mean.

Ebony Bennett [00:36:28] Isn't in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan.

Katharine Murphy [00:36:30] You didn't just give it time. These things were sorted. You know, we were still allegedly having a debate about whether science is a thing. I mean, you know, like it's obviously we've all moved on from that. And also, you know, obviously that Tanya Plibersek, the new Environment Minister, last week knocked back a Palmer proposal for a coal mine very close to the Great Barrier Reef. She didn't get that back right and partly on, you know, on on climate impacts. So obviously ministers can use discretion, but there's not an automatic trigger in the in the legislation in order to get that done. Obviously, we're going to see a conversation about that over the next few months. Also, very important, we need a transport strategy. You know, I spoke to the Climate Minister Chris Bowen on on the podcast. If regular parties are listening to this rather than watching us today, you know that already that I had a conversation with him last week that I also canvassed transport. I mean, obviously he's sort of cutting the sticker price of electric vehicles is not a transport strategy. We've got to see one that involves things like vehicle emission standards, things like rolling out infrastructure all around the country to sort of removes the range anxiety issue. A lot

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of people in Australia, you know, be worried about EVs because they like driving long distances in this very big country. So, you know, all of those things have got to be worked out again reasonably quickly over the next few months so that they can consult and start to roll it out. But anyway, look, it was it was a very important thing that happened in the opening two weeks of the Parliament getting that consensus around the rules of the road. Ridiculously, the Liberal Party consigned themselves to irrelevancy around that proposal because Peter Dutton is still very hopeful that there's another cycle of weaponisation in climate policy. About time these guys did the right thing in relation to this issue, but unfortunately not at least at this point in time. So although in fairness, you know, liberals are out there saying, well yes, we voted against the 43% legislation, but we're going to have we're going to have a better target for the next election. So. Well, look, you know, let's see, let's see where they land.

Ebony Bennett [00:38:50] Yeah, I might go to questions from the audience now. I can say we've got a fair few in here. I'm I know we normally stick to the preserve of federal government, but I've got a few people in here asking about state governments and Liberal parties being in trouble at the state level as well as the federal level. I'm not sure if that's referring to the Barilaro saga that's currently unfolding. I believe there's some type of Matthew Guy saga. Correct me if I'm wrong. I've been out of commission for a week. I'm Katherine. Can you just talk to us a little bit about what's happened happening to the Liberal Party at the moment? And is that going to be a problem for them with upcoming state elections, I guess?

Katharine Murphy [00:39:35] Well, certainly there are there are a number of Labour governments in the states at the moment. And and, you know, this I think really two remaining Liberal governments in New South Wales and Tasmania. I think the Labour Party in Tasmania, the last time I visited, which was just before the election campaign, seemed content to punch each other's lights out in the news cycle most days.

Ebony Bennett [00:39:59] So that's offensive just kind of into that situation.

Katharine Murphy [00:40:03] That's right. So that is but then, you know, there's this absolutely bizarre whole Barilaro saga which is playing out in in New South Wales at the moment. I think, you know, Dominic Perrottet will be thinking, oh god, I thought I'd just stabilised. You know, obviously there was the transition to away from Gladys Berejiklian. He had to establish himself as a new premier. They got an absolute smashing around the Lismore floods apparently rather than, you know, pretending that that was not his fault or that he was somehow not accountable. Went into the flood zone emoted. Got structures working, you know, indicated that he was serious about being a decent premier. I think they handed down a decent budget by all accounts. Then now they embroiled in this ridiculousness about John Barilaro and an overseas position that he apparently thought was fine, that that he was somehow owed. You know, this is this is sort of highly problematic for them. And it's and it's also sort of seems to there's a new kind of figure in the government who's been drawn into this sort of cycle of horror every single day. By the looks of things. It looks as though they've all had conversations about this appointment. And I saw bits and

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pieces of the Barilaro as evidence yesterday of not watching it closely, because it's not my view that we have an actual state New South Wales team who are who are covering this extremely well. But every time I tuned in, John Barilaro seemed to be, you know, sort of casting himself as some innocent dude washed up in a, you know, something beyond his control, which was, you know, been somewhat startling as the victim. Well, who was kind of like what? I mean, I didn't I didn't watch all day. So, I don't know, maybe there was more light and shade. But from what I saw, it was just kind of like what.

Peter Lewis [00:42:00] The savvy Opposition Leader Chris means had a pretty good pace in the in the Fairfax papers this week, which I think embodies the crazy brave proposition and proof point for Labour that 16 years is too long for any government. So this government is going to be going for its fourth term days with a memory, will realise that Labour managed a fourth term at the 2007 election, which was a particularly bad opposition later in Peter Debnam. But also a dry run for the WorkChoices election, said it was like a perfect storm but I got one term too many and I spent the last four years in power knifing premiers and sending ministers either to ICAC's jail. So we've got a great precedence in New South Wales for why four terms is too long and Labour's proposition is look what we did and then look what these guys are doing and we've been having these discussions for a while that, you know, basically the main argument for a change of government is just that after a certain period of time, government corrupts itself. And then you've got Barilaro and the rest of the crew just putting that in stark relief night after night after night. So a first term government, this would be something the new leader has to clean up. A second term government. They'd need to be serious changes. Is a third term going for a fourth term? It does create that sense that you've just got to change it. We're doing some New South Wales polling which we're working with your guys, Catherine, on every now and then that the latest problem we had was New South Wales Labour ahead of the Coalition on primary vote. The doorstep on that proposition 16 years is too long at 6931 regardless of who you get to vote for. So I think the dynamics in New South Wales are interesting and the scare campaign could well be Labour saying Look what we did.

Ebony Bennett [00:43:56] I just want to come to I guess the substance of that and take us to a slightly different issue. Catherine, obviously integrity was a huge issue at the federal election, but I've been kind of recovering from COVID, reading all the extracts from the upcoming books about just how close the United States came to power.

Katharine Murphy [00:44:16] Yeah.

Ebony Bennett [00:44:17] And it is alarming to me that it was essentially like a couple of generals deciding to defend the Constitution. That was really all between that came between Donald Trump overturning a democratically elected election result. And and I get the sense that it's doesn't it doesn't seem that far fetched that Trump could be re-elected and will be facing all these problems again with a few people who are as attentive to the importance of integrity and strengthening Christie as we've had in his first term of office. I mean, I don't want to obviously equate what's happening in New South Wales with that, but those are on the ends of a of a spectrum, you know,

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jobs for mates and jobs for the boys and cronyism and political appointments and that kind of thing is obviously very different to overthrowing the democratic results of an election. But. You know, they're pretty close ally of Australia. Things might be okay now, but we've got big submarine contracts coming down the line. These things are surely something that Australia is going to have to grapple with. If not, you know, Penny Wong in particular.

Katharine Murphy [00:45:34] Yeah, but you sort of fundamental points the right one that it's all sort of plots along the spectrum. Right. All of these, all of these behaviours are, you know, like we're going to do a, you know, a graph. We could plot them along a spectrum. Right. It's very important, like just to the substance of your point, which is, you know, who defends the institutions? Well, we need the institutions to defend the institutions. That's why we bang on about integrity and purpose in politics. I'm, you know, despite spending many decades to this theatre in very close proximity, remain entirely uncynical about it. It's like it's it is deeply important for, you know, the political class for actors that we elect in order to represent our interests in a representative democracy, take their responsibilities with the appropriate gravity and seriousness. It's not only about what you might be able to achieve or set up for yourself. It's about defending, you know, institutions that are the only thing that stand between us and chaos. Right? Like, that's that's that's what's on the line. That's what's important. That's why, you know, we'll work hard trying to document what's going on because these things matter. And and, you know, if we if we've got sort of people who have lost their way, if we've somehow got elected representatives who have lost that sense of purpose about their representation, then that's a big problem. It's sort of more than the spectacle of whether somebody is, you know, behaving like a clown at a parliamentary enquiry or a it's about, you know, can we trust these institutions to safeguard our interests, which is the most important thing in in politics. Is that so? You know, this is this is Pete's point about, you know, when you're around too long, you might lose your way a little bit with that. I think that's I think that's possible. But it's also I think we really need our elected representatives to be very self-aware in that sense, that they are custodians of institutions and they need to conduct themselves with that degree of seriousness, because we are we rely on them to do that. And and, you know, the American example just demonstrates that you can have a complete perversion of, you know, or an attempted perversion of those ramparts, those really important foundations, and.

Peter Lewis [00:48:03] Also the degree to which things aren't as robust as you think they might be. One of the interesting things watching the Barilaro enquiry is it's a way that after three terms of one side in power, the bureaucracy can see them moving to accommodate the will and the needs of the executive. And that that tends to be the product of self-interest and a series of small compromises until it it crosses a line. So, yeah, I think it is interesting to think through how robust our democracy actually is, which is why that integrity apply, including and I can act, but also what flows through from that I think is really, you know, going to be one of the most critical reforms of this government.

Ebony Bennett [00:48:58] Yeah. And as you say, the ICAC's not the only architecture and infrastructure that you can put in place there, but it is a very important one. We do have a few questions about what's going to happen to the IHT and the cronyism of political appointments in the last term of the Morrison government. They're increasing over time. There is a review that the

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Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus is undertaking on that front that I think we've spoken about before. Catherine, I want to come back to two different tax questions we've got a lot of people asking about is there a growing public mood to ditch the stage three income tax cuts and also a lot of people asking about a windfall profits tax on gas companies? Two very different kind of propositions.

Katharine Murphy [00:49:47] That I see. I say the same idea that we could do this quickly. Look, our polling this week indicates that there is not a groundswell out there in the community to defer the stage three tax cuts, sadly. So, you know, look, and and I think, you know, we spoke a little bit earlier in the show today just about the difficulties of, you know, the Labour Party having promised not to abandon them. Then all of a sudden they're saying, oh, well actually circumstances have changed and you know. Right, etc.. So I'd look at this point, there doesn't seem to be a groundswell of support for abandoning the stage three tax cuts, even though sorry, I'm having a voice issue. Just excuse me. No COVID at this end, but they wouldn't give it out. Sorry about that, guys. So, yeah, look, not a groundswell. Look, as it gets closer to D-Day on the stage, three tax cuts. You know, who knows what position will be in budget was or economy wise. Maybe there will be some room for the new government to argue the case that we need to delay their introduction or something. But at this stage, there's no there's no sign or evidence of that in terms of the windfall profits tax on the gas producers, which is very much around in concept.

Ebony Bennett [00:51:14] And it's got a huge number of kind of prominent public advocate today.

Katharine Murphy [00:51:19] Yeah, well, the Australia Institute is sort of done some work in this space. We had the Secretary-General of the UN, I don't know if he I don't know if he I can't remember if he explicitly endorsed a windfall profits tax or not. But he was certainly there was some very big fighting words from the UN Secretary-General in recent days, just about the fossil fuel industry and about sort of profit taking on, on the way out, which is that the cycle that we're in now, look, I think we've said before on the show, probably not for several weeks because it I think we've needed really to go there just struggling to remember. But anyway, one area that the government's left itself, some room to move on pre-election is the multinational tax avoidance space. The government announced some measures ahead of time, ahead of the election and made it clear that more might happen in this space so that they've got a little bit of room and and there's a lot of ministers around because of gas supply issues in the country at the moment. Ed Husic last week absolutely let rip against the gas gas companies and talking about their social licence and so on and so forth. So I don't know, maybe there is a bit of a political constituency for this, but I do still think it is very difficult for a Labour Government. You know, a number of them were ministers in the Rudd-Gillard period when the mining super profits tax was obviously an issue that nearly killed them. So, you know, I don't think that'll be their first resort. But the idea of, you know, of the gas sector doing very well at this point in time. And also they're not necessarily guaranteeing domestic supply to Australians. That's probably probably not real smart of them at this point in time. So anyway, I think it's a bit of a watch this space. I wouldn't anticipate some new massive tax. I just don't think that that's where they would automatically land. But I think there is some room here to where they where it's possible that could do something.

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Ebony Bennett [00:53:29] Yeah. Yet, Pete, the issue of a social licence for gas I think is so important because on the one hand, it's kind of seen as this great transition fuel, even though it's a fossil fuel itself. But on the other hand, yeah, like I think there has been a growing backlash against this idea that, you know, they're raking in the profits and yet, you know, the policy is and others of talking about, you know, what little they give back and that there's going to, you know, they're exploiting all about gas instead of selling it to us at a decent price. Like there is there is a social licence argument in there somewhere there.

Peter Lewis [00:54:07] But it is complicated. Like my generation. Remember natural gas with the blue leotards on the on the on the TV ad. It was it was it was amazing. And, you know, the I think then you go through the journey to fracking, which created real environmental concerns not to do with the fossil fuel nature, but just the disruption to aquifers and water tables. But the other complication at the moment is the debate around gas reserves. So on one level, there is this whole debate saying we want access to our gas as it's something that will assist us with our immediate energy needs. And then there is the whole broader debate about the development of the gas industry and the profitability of the gas industry. So I don't I think. We sometimes fall into the trap of making I either call evil or gas evil. It's much more nuanced than that. And finding a way to. I have an economic story about how much the industry is making and they have a transition story about the role that different energy sources are going to play. Meeting our needs in the long term. Is all grown up work and it's not stuff that you can actually either put in a leotard or on a cartoon.

Katharine Murphy [00:55:31] I want to see I want to see coal in the later.

Peter Lewis [00:55:34] Part of the lobby of the lamp going to be made a big.

Katharine Murphy [00:55:40] Deal.

Ebony Bennett [00:55:41] So we've got another couple of questions in here around voice and kind of that the no campaign and other things like that. But I think we might. I think that's going to be a subject we'll revisit quite often. So we might come back to that in future, perhaps when we've heard a little bit more from what some of those no voices are going to be and some of the lines that they're trying to run there and just sticking, I guess, with gas and coal and climate. We've got a couple of people in here asking about the changes around offshore wind. Catherine, is that something that you can speak to?

Katharine Murphy [00:56:26] Yeah, well, the government moved forward. I think it was Friday because this Friday just gone with sort of flagging a new offshore wind precinct to sort of develop that that, you know, that all that industry is an industry. That's what I'm struggling for. The word what will I call it, of course, is an industry offshore wind and an interestingly will certainly in the comments I saw quoted. I didn't actually write the story last week, a colleague did, but I saw Darren

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Chester, who's the Victorian National. His electorate is adjacent to the area that's in contemplation, sounding very positive about it, that there were good opportunities associated, that obviously, you know, these things, these developments are always controversial in place. Right. A lot of people can support renewable energy as a principle, but don't necessarily want a giant wind farm in front of their beach house or you know, I'm concerned about migratory paths for birds or various other things that come up in the process of considering these things. So anyway, again, that was that one's got a way to run, that one's got a wider role. But again, the government sort of knows that, you know, it's now it's got these targets legislation almost through the parliament that they are actually now going to need to develop, you know, deliver the outcome. So, you know, I don't think we'll be watching the grass grow under Chris Bowen's fate, if that's even an analogy any more. I can't even remember, but I think he'll be on. He's moving quickly basically to try and get a number of these things sort of going simultaneously.

Ebony Bennett [00:58:15] And just a final word before we wrap up, Catherine. I know you've talked about the coalition's nuclear strategy just being a further example of delay. Could you just kind of talk talk us through that? Because it always amazes me that somehow we can't get renewables right because it's too complicated. But building a nuclear industry is going to be a piece of cake.

Katharine Murphy [00:58:40] No worries that. Well, it was it's sort of on many levels. You know, we did have the coalition government signing up to the August arrangement, which was always perplexing in the absence of a domestic nuclear industry. But the coalition, when they were in power 5 minutes ago, said, oh, no, no, we're not having a domestic nuclear industry. No, no, no, we don't need any of that. It'll be fine. We'll just import the reactors and they will bolt minis from this side, you know mod so that and now Peter Dutton's really into opposition has had to say something on the day obviously where it was clear that they were going to vote down the targets. Legislation has suggested that one of his MPs who has already done an enquiry into nuclear energy, already done one in the last term of government, made a number of recommendations that Scott Morrison comprehensively ignored. We'll now do a second enquiry for the Liberals about nuclear. Now to be clear, look, a lot of people oppose nuclear on principle. I'm not one of those people. I am get the emissions down via whatever technology you have available person I don't get. I'm not particularly caught up in being anti-nuclear. I'm quite fine with it. But the thing is, it is the most expensive energy technology available at this point in time. The small modular reactors that people are talking about, according to the CSIRO, are at least a decade away from delivery. And like what? You know, it's sort of. It's nuts. You know, we had an enquiry in Australia in 2006 that was led by Ziggy Switkowski for John Howard. Look, if we built nuclear power plants at that time that probably would have made sense. Waiting for another decade.

Ebony Bennett [01:00:28] Would have required a carbon tax, correct?

Katharine Murphy [01:00:31] Well, this is the thing. You know, all these advocates of nuclear energy, strangely, also oppose carbon taxes and often from political parties that allegedly not in favour of government subsidy. And nuclear requires bodies. It requires government subsidy and a

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carbon price to be in any way economic. So, look, the point I was making last week, or maybe it was the week before anyway, I've tried to expunge this from my memory is that this is ridiculous. And, and I very much hope that, you know, my, my colleagues in this corridor and elsewhere, whom I very much respect, will not indulge this as some, you know, actual proposal, because it is not an actual proposal. It is just something to say on the day you're voting down a 43% emissions reduction target. So it's a nonsense. Yeah.

Ebony Bennett [01:01:28] Thank you. We might have to wrap it up there. I'm sorry we didn't get to everyone's questions. I know there was a bunch more around tax. We might invite one of our economists on next time around to help tackle some of those, but appreciate all your questions today. And I feel that we covered between integrity and climate and other things, a range of topics. But thanks very much, everyone. Thanks, Pete. Thanks, Katherine. Stay safe out there, everyone. And don't forget to check out the podcast. Thanks very much. Bye.