

# Poll Position

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*In conversation with*

**Ebony Bennett**

Deputy Director at the Australia Institute

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**Ebony Bennett** [00:00:03] Gday everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute and welcome to Poll Position the fortnightly show where we take a deep dive into the latest results from the Guardian Essential Poll. 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, and a reminder that these days and times for webinars do vary. So head on over to [AustraliaInstitute.org.au](http://AustraliaInstitute.org.au) to register for upcoming webinars. Next week we have not one but two webinars. On Tuesday we'll be talking to the Pacific Elders Voice and to the former president of Kiribati, Anote Tong, and former President Remengesau Junior. I'm going to have to learn how to pronounce that before next week. Former President of Palau on Tuesday. That's for our Regional Climate Diplomacy Forum. And on Wednesday we'll be talking to photojournalist Andrew Quilty about his new book coming up, August in Kabul. Don't forget to subscribe to our podcast, Follow the Money, where we explain big economic issues in plain English. And before we dive in, just a couple of Zoom tips. Don't forget, you can type questions in for our panel into the Q&A box. A reminder to please keep things civil and on topic in the chat or will beat you out. And finally, a reminder that this discussion is live. It is being recorded and the video will go up on Australia Institute TV later on today and the audio will go up on Guardian Australia and the Guardian's Australian Politics podcast sometime tomorrow. For those of you listening on the podcast, you can find all the essential poll results at a central report dot com dot eight so you can play along at home. As always, it's been a big few weeks in politics. The job summit was last week with a big focus on industrial relations reform and also improving women's participation in the workforce. But unfortunately, real wages are still declining and profits are up yet again. In the Parliament we've seen the Restoring Territory Rights Bill has been introduced into the Senate for debate, which probably won't happen until next year. But that's brought voluntary assisted dying back onto the political agenda. And obviously the Government has announced an enquiry headed by former High Court Justice Virginia Bell into the revelations that former Prime Minister Scott Morrison secretly appointed himself to five additional portfolios, which really brought integrity way back onto the agenda and onto the agenda for today's Essential Poll. So to discuss all that and more, I'm delighted to introduce our panel today. I'll start with Bill. Next to me, Bill Browne,

director of the Australia Institute's Democracy and Accountability Program. Sarah Martin, Chief Political Correspondent at Guardian Australia. And Pete Lewis, Executive Director of Essential Media. Thank you all for joining us today. Sarah, I might start with you just for our usual kind of recap of the fortnight in politics. It's certainly been busy for the Government, the jobs summit. How did that end up turning out for the Albanese Government? Did they manage expectations adequately?

**Sarah Martin** [00:03:19] I think they really did and I think it was overwhelmingly positive for them. I mean obviously a couple of weeks ago you had the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese really downplaying expectations, sort of saying it's not going to be a repeat of 1983 and you know, don't expect too much basically, but it's great to have everyone in the room talking. They obviously went above and beyond that. They not only got everyone in the room talking and appearing to collaborate, but they did have some concrete outcomes as well, both on the industrial relations front, but also some other measures that I think people were hoping to achieve. There's still some sort of fine print to work out, particularly when it comes to things like multi-employer bargaining, which we know is going to face some resistance from industry. And Tony Burke has said in trying to process to now begin consultations on how those changes to the Fair Work Act might look. But look, overall, definitely a win for the Government. You know, I think Albanese has completely read the room correctly when he says people have got conflict fatigue. And I think regardless, you know, particularly, you know, Peter Dutton's decision not to attend. He sort of consigned himself to irrelevancy with that decision. And so you had all the peak bodies represented in that room and you know, you had pretty some pretty extraordinary things, like people like Christie Kane talking to Andrew Forrest for the first time, two very prominent West Australians from very different walks of life. But I think, you know, it was great, great to see that see that talking happening and to see some consensus emerging between unions and industry.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:04:56] Yeah. And as for other things on the agenda, obviously the budget is coming up, but, you know, there's always other things kind of bubbling away. What should people be on the lookout for on the horizon before we kind of dive into the and. Poll results.

**Sarah Martin** [00:05:15] Sure. So this week, obviously, there's been a bit of attention again on the climate bill that the government wants to get through the Senate. There's been some sort of last minute I was going to say horse trading, but let's be more generous than that. Some last minute negotiations with Jacqui Lambie and David Pocock about amendments they wanted to see included with the climate bill. That seems to be some agreement reached on that now that with the Government accepting some of David Pocock amendments. So the Government is very confident that that climate bill will pass the Senate this week, which is no small feat given everywhere, given the journey we've been on with climate change policy in this country, even though this bill is obviously largely symbolic, it's obviously very important that it passes the Parliament and enshrines that 43% emissions reduction target into law. So that's this week. And then next week the big thing is going to be the introduction of the Integrity Commission bill. We know that the Government's been sort of working, particularly with a lot of those independent MPs who are elected on a platform of integrity, has been working with those MPs on what the final model is going to look like and so all shall be revealed when Mark Dreyfus introduces that bill into Parliament next week.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:06:27] Yeah, exciting times indeed. We might come now since we're speaking of integrity to the poll results, let me see if I can share them here. Is that working for everyone? Pat. You're on meat there, I think.

**Peter Lewis** [00:06:49] That's a great way to start, isn't it? So there is a bit of an integrity theme running through the questions this week. But we start off just with the rise and rise of our new prime minister. Guys that are regular poll position attendees would have noticed that massive increase after the election in approvals. Before the election it was basically line or negative. After the election it got two 5918 approvals. It's dipped a bit over the first three months, but it's really back up now to where it was a couple of slightly more people disapproving, but also that down to 59, 25, we're not really even really bothering with Dutton at the moment. If people are desperate to know how unpopular it is, I'm happy to throw it in in a month's time, but.

**Sarah Martin** [00:07:41] I'll do.

**Peter Lewis** [00:07:41] It as as sorry as I'm. Sarah said he really dealt him out of the public himself, out of the public debate by boycotting the jobs summit. And a really interesting counterpoint with David Littleproud, who turned up and rolled up his sleeves and got about the business. I'll put a piece up on The Guardian today, just reflecting on both the figures we're doing today, but also the summit. And also, you know, against the backdrop of Joe Biden's speech, address to the nation last week about the fragility of democracy. And that was just a line that struck with me from that speech, which was about saying politics not as total war, but the mediation of our differences. And I did think that what we got out of this summit last week is a model for mediating differences rather than amplifying them. And if there was any change that I think is reflected in these numbers. To Sarah's point about conflict fatigue, it is a different model of doing politics, where solving the problem is the objective rather than amplifying it for political gain.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:08:43] Yeah, certainly a different way. A different way of arguing.

**Peter Lewis** [00:08:46] And and likewise sorry, I didn't say it moved on in terms of our sort of benchmark. When is the country heading in the right or wrong direction? Guess what? When we start doing that, more people think the country is heading in the wrong direction. So, you know, these are tough economic times. The world's a scary place, there's climate catastrophe, but there is a basic positivity within the Australian public that's there is an amazing resource for a government to tackle.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:09:12] The next one is digging into this saga of the secret ministries of Scott Morrison, an excellent adventure novel indeed.

**Peter Lewis** [00:09:22] And, you know, it's not about kicking someone when they're down, but, you know, he's you know, he's he needs to I and this and I again reflecting on what's going on in the states let's. Let's be clear. We had our prime minister extending his executive powers without telling anyone, even his colleagues, like if that doesn't send a shiver down the spine of people who care about democratic processes. I don't know what would. And again, you know, say over 50% agreeing that the Prime Minister should appear at the enquiry into the issue. More than that, 59%, including, I might say 45% of coalition voters agree that the former Prime Minister's behaviour has diminished the reputation of his government and then a majority of people saying it's time to resign and again, also a third of Coalition voters agreeing with that proposition. So I do think Australia is ready to close the book on the Morrison era. I think the challenge for the Dutton Opposition is to let's take the chance for the Coalition is to also close the door and you've got to say one half of the Coalition was closing the door last week and getting involved in the summit and the other one was doing what they've always done, which was union bashing.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:10:45] Yeah, I might go on to this next one. On support for a federal ICAC.

**Peter Lewis** [00:10:53] Who would have thought? It's still 75. It peaked at 82 in September 18. But this has been something that's been so popular for so long that I think people look at the government, the former government's in action on this and scratch their head and wonder what was going on. It almost makes you feel like the opposition is because they've done something wrong. And I'm not saying they have, although any reader of The Guardian would say that there is a whole lot of content that may be subject to future enquiries. However, the fact that these guys stood in the way of such a popular reform speaks volumes of the way they were approaching the task of government. It also created the backlash. You know, the tail independents ran on a trinity. They ran on climate, gender and integrity. And the integrity was clear. That's the same answer just with this one. So you can probably click past that one. But 76% support, basically nobody opposes it. And again, across partisan lines you're looking at Coalition voters, 75% of Coalition voters, a lot of fish, a lot maybe that numbers up since the last election. But it is just it is an uncontested idea that the, you know, a little bit like action on climate that when you've got that number of the public wanting change and government can't do it, it actually undermines the integrity of government because it needs to be reflecting the will of the people.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:12:35] We've got.

**Peter Lewis** [00:12:36] Maybe.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:12:36] Questions here on Powers.

**Peter Lewis** [00:12:37] Yes, there was. We only put this in because we were asking at the end of last year. So it's and you can say all these responses are trending up. So 61% up from 52 believe that. And I should be able to start an investigation of corruption based on a complaint or whistleblower information. 57, up from 53 want to see a commission, have a single unified commission with the same powers to investigate corruption in law enforcement, police and the public service. And that's critical because part of what the former government was trying to do was decouple the politics of political scrutiny out of that. And again, a big shift from 47 to 55 in the proposition it should be able to hold public hearings for the details of the cases. The transparent, the only area where there isn't such support is this proposition. It should only be able to start an investigation. Once you've established a crime, it's likely been committed. Now that is actually a little bit of a tautology because you wouldn't run something ahead of a crime. But that was the argument the coalition was running, which was why we wanted to test whether there was sympathy for that. So you can say that basically the first question about running on a complaint for whistleblower information and the last question I read a way asking the same thing, but framing it differently, but very much providing a forum and an avenue for whistleblowers to go is really popular.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:14:10] Yeah, Bill, I might come to you next. The institute has done quite a lot of research in this area and worked with judges on what some of those powers would be. Why are some of those powers so important to an effective commission?

**Bill Browne** [00:14:23] Yeah, I think some of those powers really go to the heart of the commission being able to do its job. On the case of taking complaints from whistleblowers or the general public, for example. David Ipp is the former head of New South Wales. ICAC's has said that the Eddie Obeid investigation started with an anonymous tip. So in the absence of being able to take those, you know, whistleblower tips and so on from the public, you're potentially not able to even get the investigations started and unearth what's really going on. That's in contrast to the Coalition government's model, which would really have depended on the public service and so on, making the referrals. At which point you run the risk, even if everyone's doing the right thing, of there being an appearance of something being done wrong. I was a little worried with those numbers about not being able to investigate in the absence of a criminal offence. But I think in practise, if people have walked through the limits of criminal offences in these kinds of investigations, you'd get people on board with the idea that they're not the be all and end all of the investigation. And the National Integrity Committee has put together a bit of a list of wrongdoing that isn't necessarily a criminal offence and includes things like nepotism, using public money for political or personal gain, using a serious misuse of the entitlements of your office again for your own benefit. And if you imagine a corrupt politician, that's actually the kinds of things you imagine them doing. So certainly they're being able to investigate. Those things would go to the heart of what an integrity commission needs to do.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:16:17] And Sarah, coming back to you, you've said the legislation is expected to be introduced next week. I know they've been going through a big period of consultation, but you would expect that this bill will be fairly robust, not only because Labour was committed to it prior to

the election, but independents have been running so hard on elements of this for so long. I feel like the public's understanding of this is actually quite sophisticated at this point.

**Sarah Martin** [00:16:46] Yeah, I think that's an interesting, interesting point to make. And I thought that in those questions, perhaps the support for some of those measures was as a result of increasing awareness of what some of those things actually would mean. So obviously Mark Dreyfus has it was it was a pre-election commitment. We know a fair bit about what's in the bill, but we also know a few things that are missing. We know that obviously will operate independently of government. It will have reasonably broad jurisdiction to investigate serious or systemic corruption. That was one change that they made initially. It was serious and systemic. But we've following some of the roundtables, the crossbench that was sort of toughened up slightly. It will have the power to investigate ministers, public servants, statutory office holders and contractors. You'll also be able to commence enquiries on its own initiative or in response to tip offs from the public or from anyone, which is obviously not a feature of the the Coalition's previous bill. And it will also not will be able to investigate both criminal and non criminal corrupt conduct which which again is a slightly lower threshold than what we previously seen on the table. So. And also interesting to note, it will be able to investigate contacts that had occurred before it was actually established and it will have the power to hold public hearings. Some of the we're not 100% sure of the process of the threshold for those public hearings as yet. All we know from the government so far is that they've said they will occur when it's in the public interest to do so. So the mechanism for that is yet to be sort of fleshed out or seen by us, at least. We know that some of the independents are pushing for further things like whistleblower protections and a slightly beefed up oversight role for a parliamentary joint committee. So some of those things, we will know the full detail of what we see the legislation next week. But I guess as a starting point, we know that it's a lot better than what we've previously signed and it has taken in some of those elements that were in Helen Heinz's bill, which is obviously she attempted to get through in the last Parliament. So, yeah, look, I think it's it's been a long time coming and going back to the poll today. I mean, obviously, the government has really emphasised that this is part of trying to restore some of that public trust in federal parliament, which is obviously, you know, at shockingly low levels. So clearly, this is something that needs to be done as a first step to try and restore some of that faith in politics.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:19:24] Yeah, I can see we've got about 550 people on the line with us. Thanks for joining us for pole position today, Pete. I was interested in your reflections and the connexions with Joe Biden's speech and the recent jobs summit and that spirit of collaboration. How much does this push on integrity and being seen to do politics a little bit more collaboratively, kind of play off one another or reinforce one another in that idea of restoring trust your own me to campaign. Sorry.

**Peter Lewis** [00:19:58] Sorry. I'm having a shocker today, guys. I think it's two parts to the one story. I think it's really easy to well, it's not really easy, but it is very convenient to embody a value in a piece of legislation so that federal law is a positive step to improve integrity in public law. But that doesn't solve the whole problem. It creates almost a safety net underneath it. The way you build integrity in public life is, by the way, that you conduct public life in the way that you exercise power. And again, as we saw, as we are increasingly learning, the model of the previous government was to

concentrate power, to hoard it, dispense it and trade it. What I think we saw with the summit is a model where power is distributed and shared out broad. More broadly in society doesn't mean the government is not responsible for the final decisions, but it means a very different way of making decisions. If you civil society, citizens working through unions, business chambers, other groups can resolve differences, identify problems and come up with an approach and come to us. We will listen to you. Now, that all sounds really cute, but it is actually creates a more resilient democracy. And you can say the opposite of that in what's been happening in the States and not just under Trump, but for a couple of generations. The concentration of corporate lobbying power on both sides of the aisle, the vast bulk of working people feeling totally disengaged from politics and of course, turning to simple solutions. So I did think that the Biden speech and sort of marking out some territory and then what's going on in Australia. On one level it's quite heartening. I wouldn't over, you know, glorify where we are as a nation. I think that if you looked at the trust figures that we put out, again, it's still pretty ordinary. Like it's not like we've all become civic citizens in a couple of months. But I can see a journey that if the government continues along this road and takes the model for jobs and skills into other areas of wicked public policy, there is this opportunity to get a sense that we can move forward. One final reflection The 1983 summit delivered the prices and income accord, but it also delivered a degree of trust that allowed for the broader economic reforms that followed. Setting the conditions for collaborative government is more than one summit, but it can create a dynamic which is really positive.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:22:48] Yeah, I was really struck by Jim Chalmers ahead of time and I guess trying to manage expectations around the summit. You know, people were putting to him all the specific proposals that various groups were bringing, whether it was unions or business to the summit. And he was just more or less kept saying, well, that's not government policy, but we want to hear everyone's ideas and we're not going to agree with all of them. They should all be part of the discussion. And it was just I honestly couldn't remember the last time a much better politician say anything remotely like it. And yeah, it just struck me as that just sounded very different and doesn't immediately put everyone on the defensive or that, you know, boxed into a position, but that, you know, options are on the table and they want to hear from them. It's just a bit of a different atmosphere, hopefully. Phil, I was going to ask specifically coming back to some of those provisions and the idea of trust that Pete was talking about there, you talked about why public hearings are important there, that it can inspire people to come forward and things. And it is often quite contentious. Sarah mentioned the idea that they're not sure yet if this bill will have the how the public hearings will actually work. They'll have the ability to have them. But things like ICAC's in New South Wales, they still have the ability to hold private hearings. They don't all have to be public. It's not the default. How does that work and why is that important?

**Bill Browne** [00:24:21] Yeah, that's right. So integrity commissions, when they have the power to hold public hearings, don't do so just by default. Usually it's a decision of the commissioner or commissioners based on the idea that holding that hearing would be in the public interest. And usually you hold some private hearings first to find out the lay of the land before making that serious step. But having that option is very important, partly to negate one of the most common criticisms of integrity commissions, which is that their star chambers, which. Decisions are made in secret. And holding that public hearing firstly gives a chance for others who might have useful evidence to come

forward. It's a much higher level of public profile than any private hearing could be. And then secondly, it lets the public observe what's going on. Thinking about New South Wales, like when premiers and former premiers have made appearances, it would be much harder to bring the public along on that journey if they were kept in the dark until the final decisions are made. So that's one reason why it's so important to have that option for public hearings.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:25:38] I think we might have lost Sarah for a minute there. Hopefully she can look back on it. She's still on. Just turn off the camera for a bit and we'll go very shortly. Two questions from the audience there. And I can say we've got questions on stage three, tax cuts, a bit of climate and integrity. But, Bill, if I can just stick with you for a minute. Integrity is obviously much bigger than just ICAC's. Pete was talking about, you know, it's necessary but not sufficient to restore trust. One of the other elements that you think some of the independents might be pushing in this new parliament along that integrity agenda.

**Bill Browne** [00:26:17] So one obvious one is truth in political advertising reforms, something that's been a priority for Zali Steggall since the last election in 2019. And she's put together a private member's bill which would implement those reforms based on the model in South Australia. You know, Australia's actually had truth in political advertising laws for over 30 years in South Australia and they've been tried and tested there. I think it's so obvious that when people see politicians peddling inaccurate information, that's got to damage public trust in the in the Parliament. Along with that, we've seen moves more recently from Sophie Scott's to change how political appointments are made. So one of the controversies in the Morrison government was around the politicisation of appointments to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, which reviews some of the decisions that government makes around visas and welfare and so on, and making sure that appointments like that to the ABC board and all of the many other appointments that government makes are actually done in a way that's open merit based with an independent panel would go a long way to giving people some confidence. Yeah.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:27:39] We might go to questions from the audience now and just a reminder that we've got you can type in your questions for the panel and it'll come out. We should also be able to upvote other people's questions if you like them and make comments on them as well. I'm Sarah coming to you. We've got a couple of questions here about the stage three tax cuts, one from Bridget, another from Corey asking will Labour be able to get out of implementing the stage three tax cuts? And also, Pete, Corey's asking if he can stick a stage three tax cuts question into the into the next essential poll. Sarah, what are the politics of that looking like at the moment? I mean, we know there's been a huge focus that I'm not sure the Albanese Government was expecting to come so soon onto stage three. And you know, it's a long time until they're actually implemented. It's a long time for this debate to kind of bubble along.

**Sarah Martin** [00:28:36] Yeah, I mean it's sort of they're kind of caught between a rock and a hard place at the moment. Like, obviously it's it's not easy to break what is was pretty much an election promise. I mean, Albanese was asked many times during the campaign about their support for the

stage three tax cuts and he sort of had no choice at that point but to really back them in without otherwise, you know, sort of be at risk of being the subject of a vicious scare campaign at the election. I think it's easy to forget that the government only has a one seat majority, so they are going to be cautious in the lead up to the next election. But at the same time, pressure is building on them to scrap the stage three tax cuts, particularly the, you know, the benefit that goes to the highest income earners. And we know from the good work you guys have done, just how inequitable they are, both for higher income earners, but also when you look at it through a gender lens. So it is it is a really difficult one for them politically. I, I wonder whether they might find a more creative way around it and not break the promise, but, you know, have have some sort of other revenue measure, perhaps something like a deficit levy or a pandemic recovery levy or something like that, to try and the balance the scales somewhat. Excuse me 1/2. Just how.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:29:57] Right.

**Peter Lewis** [00:29:59] I just signed a stage three at my. What the why I'm trying to think it through is through that prism of integrity. So clearly breaking a promise feels counter integrity so to do is flattening the tax system so that we basically get rid of something that's been essential about our democracy that would enable a whole bunch of really important measures that a lot of groups in society are pushing for. I wonder if it's actually on them to scrap the stage three tax cuts or on asked to create the conditions where that becomes the only political opportunity. I think if we all just sit there and in the chat go, yeah, they've got to scrap the tax cuts. We're actually. It ain't going to happen and we're actually setting themselves up for a smash. But if over time, like in Sarah's, right, there's a couple of years for this to play out organising around that. And again, kudos for you guys for running that forum last week the it was the revenue summit but. I. If the model of collaboration is true and all these groups in society are saying this is not the right way to go. That to me is the only theory of change in terms of this happening.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:31:21] Yeah, it's it's a really interesting one because I think, you know, they've been very careful in in their language. But again, when you say. Up to civil society and the public to kind of make that case to to ditch them. I mean, it's a long time before they come into place. That's a long time for various groups to be establishing the names, whether it's for, if you, the coalition, greater defence spending or you know, if you labour trying to implement election policies when they keep talking about, you know, we can't afford to do this, we can't afford to do that. It's now essentially the go to thing for people to say, well, the stage three, how come we can afford the stage three tax cuts but we can't afford X, Y or Z? So I think there will be a big campaign payout because the the tax cuts are so unequal and so egregiously unequal that there are very easy bogeymen for a lot of people. And it's such a huge amount of money that people can can really see, I think, the wisdom once they know the facts about it. Sarah earlier mentioned some of the Australia Institute's research and referred to it. Obviously we've done the research that shows the bulk of the benefit of the tax cuts goes primarily to high income earners. The gender disparity that she was talking about, because men on the whole in higher incomes than women will benefit to the tune of \$2 for every \$1 that women receive. Young people largely miss that. You know, people on lower incomes largely miss out. So, yeah, I think a long way to go on stage three tax cuts. But I thought Pete made a really

interesting point there on, you know, what civil society has to do to step up and essentially create the conditions where labour has the space to move on this a little bit. Sarah coming back to him.

**Sarah Martin** [00:33:17] Sorry about that. One thing I would add is that, you know, because there is so much revenue pressure on the government as well at the moment, every time they are asked about spending that they can meet, they are going to be asked, well, what about the choice to support the stage three tax cuts? So I think, as you said, those conditions that will lead to the pressure that might get them to at least tweak the tax cuts, I think is going to be really important. And I can't see that pressure doing anything other than growth given that the revenue side of the budget.

**Peter Lewis** [00:33:50] It's almost like a reverse magic pudding, isn't it? So no matter what your problem is, the stage three tax cuts would make it okay. That's their problem, right?

**Ebony Bennett** [00:33:59] Yeah. Well, looking at that, got in the amazing kind of data journalism you did there with what could you buy with \$240 billion? And it's like, as Richard, our chief former chief economist and our executive director says, we're one of the richest countries in the world. We can't do everything we want. But, you know, we can pick some things that we want to do. There's a lot that you can buy with \$240 billion over ten years. Yeah. Yeah, it's very persuasive in that way. I'm Sarah. The next question that I've got for you is around the climate change bill, and it's from John Knox. And he asks, what will it take for the Labour government to up their ambition from an uninspiring 43% reduction? And will they be required to stand by the recommendations of their scientific advisory panel, the Climate Change Authority with was that up to you at the moment?

**Sarah Martin** [00:34:58] Okay. Well, I think in terms of getting them to amp up their ambition, then again, we'll come back to that idea of the conditions that will push them there. We know that already the government's under a fair amount of pressure from not just the independents but the Greens and other crossbenchers in terms of being more ambitious with its climate change bill. We know that this is just sort of the first, the first stage of the fight, I guess. And the Greens have already indicated that when it comes to the legislation of the safeguard mechanism and there's sort of some will wait and see what legislation is actually needed for that. But you know, there's another opportunity there for the government to be pushed on its ambition and again on its approval of new fossil fuel projects. And of course, there's the APC Act review and the government has committed to introducing legislation in response to that next year. So again, that's another opportunity. The Greens are clearly pushing the climate trigger legislation. They've introduced a private amendment this week in to both houses and they've made it clear that they're unlikely to support the APEC reforms that the Government has flagged unless there's going to be some movement with the climate trigger element to that. So I guess on the legislative front, there's several opportunities there to push the government further. And of course, there's also, you know, we've got the 2030, we've got the 2050. We need to fill in the gaps between those two targets as

well. So there's an opportunity to perhaps if they're looking ahead to a 2035 target, which clearly they will need to do, then, you know, there's an opportunity there, too, to also increase the ambition.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:36:52] Yeah. The next question that I've got is from Peter O'Donohue. He asks, Given the concern expressed around labour expanding oil and gas exploration, support for continued exporting of fossil fuels and granting licences for big gas projects. At what point will discontent within the government become evident? If ever before I throw to someone, I did just want to draw attention to the Prime Minister addressing the Minerals Council the other night, maybe last night or the night before, more or less assuring them that fossil fuel exports will continue. I'm not quite sure how much they understand if a lot of that expansion goes ahead, how much more difficult that will make the task of achieving their 43% target. Sarah do you think there is an understanding of just how much exports contribute to that or are they just willing to kind of cop it, make everyone else do more work? Because you know, the politics of it are a bit are a bit wicked.

**Sarah Martin** [00:37:56] The politics of it are wicked. And then again, you've got these sort of mixed views within Labour about, you know, the need for new gas projects and also the what some argue is the strategic importance of allowing those gas exports, for example, to Japan. And we saw Madeleine King last week with the Japanese ambassador sort of reassuring them that Australia wasn't about to put in a domestic gas reserve policy despite the calls for it. I mean, I think that there's another interesting pressure point there in terms of a super profits tax on the resources companies as well, and particularly where we've got a situation where what's been happening with oil and gas prices means that, you know, the resources companies are, you know, sleeping, sleeping under piles of money every night. And Australians, Australians are struggling to pay their power bills. So it's sort of interesting that we're not that debate is in a little bit more lively now as well. I mean, Ed Husic has sort of said all things are subject to change and I think there are some who would like that to be revisited. But again, going back to the governments and particularly Anthony Albanese, sort of making a virtue of no sudden moves and no no surprises and sticking to doing what he says and saying what he means. And I don't suspect there'll be any grand changes on that from.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:39:24] There's also quite a hip pocket element obviously, to energy prices. I know Essential's been looking quite a lot at the cost of living crisis over the past few months. Does that does that give the Albanese Government potentially room to move around either a windfall profits tax like Garneau or super profits tax like Garneau and others have suggested, because the cost of living pressures are just going to become too great.

**Peter Lewis** [00:39:53] Yeah, I think you've got the fuel excise. I'm struggling for the word here, but you know what I mean, dropping off and also interest rates rising. Where the government pitches its measures around easing cost of living problem, solution, narrative. It's got a much better chance of it landing. I think the reflection from the last cycle of government was they came up with a lot of big ideas without articulating the problem that we're trying to solve, particularly with the mining tax. So again, I. I think the political project for Labour is to manage. The immediate challenges around cost

of living and climate and energy transition while setting themselves up for a two or three year term. So I don't think we can expect to get everything immediately. And I think a lot of what people are going to be moving activism towards is a second term agenda. I think that the first term agenda in terms of, you know, what they've done with the energy pricing, what they've done with integrity, voice to parliament, caring economy, the arguments that went down on the job summit that is close to an agenda for a time and I think they will be cautious about doing a rod and this jumping on the next big thing every other week. I don't think there was worried about headlines as it was. So I think there will be a sense of let's just go on a journey with some of these issues. Now, I get that there is urgency around some of these issues, particularly around opening up new energy sources, the gas sense and obviously coal mines. But. The challenge, the challenge for progressives and activists is for us to do the long term strategizing rather than the immediate hits as well, because I don't think the immediate hits are going to get us where we want.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:42:00] Yeah, certainly, I guess gas and coal prices. I mean, the reason people are talking about a windfall profits tax is because their profits are through the roof, largely because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But, Bill, I know you've done some research in the past around some of the other ways that gas and coal kind of get government support or extend their social licence or just keep hanging on when things look uneconomic. I'm thinking here of carbon capture and storage, which perennially kind of comes up, but there's really not a lot of research backing that anymore. There's going to be fewer and fewer places, presumably for the fossil fuel industry to hide. What are some of the problems with things like carbon capture and storage?

**Bill Browne** [00:42:46] Yeah, I think we've really seen carbon capture and storage used as a delaying tactic by the fossil fuel industry. The technology has never really come into fruition. There's one major site in Australia. There's some around the world. But compared to something like the immediate take off of renewable energy production, you can look at the figures from ten years ago, the carbon capture and storage pipeline, and say that it just hasn't delivered. But it's kept being used as an excuse for inaction. So while taking paid point about kind of the limited opportunities to change in this term of government, one thing we certainly can do is head off bad ideas as a reaction to changing circumstances are always pushing for the adoption of more renewable energy to address high energy prices and limited energy sources, and similarly, not letting new bad ideas kind of propagate.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:43:48] The next question I've got here is probably for you, Bill, in the first instance as well as from Paul Smith. Do you think the integrity legislation will allow retrospective reviews? If you could cover up on that? And will it look at the purely political appointments of unqualified members to the IHT? I know your programme looked into that as well.

**Bill Browne** [00:44:09] So yes, to the former, the Attorney-General's been quite clear that the anti-corruption watchdog would be able to look retroactively at past misconduct, and that's pretty standard if you think about something like calling a royal commission, which has similar powers. There'd be no point calling it if it couldn't look back in time and what or what has already been done.

And similarly, the commission would be pretty toothless without that option. So absolutely it will be able to look back. How far it will look back is kind of question left for the commissioners in practise. I think it's fair to say there'll be enough kind of referrals and complaints made that it won't be able to kind of litigate things that are well in the past unless they're very serious, because it will just have quite a lot of things to look at, whether it looks at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal appointments process. I certainly think that's an option for it to do. I don't think we know at this point if it will. A bit of background on that is that the Australia Institute had some research out earlier this year which found a disturbing trend towards more political appointments being made to the party and those appointees often having less or no legal qualifications compared to appointments to the party who weren't political. So whether that's investigated by the Integrity Commission, there is some degree of enquiry already going on from the Attorney General as well as him announcing some changes to the appointments process already. So we'll get a bit more information out about that. But I don't know if it'll be the Integrity Commission per se in looking at it.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:45:57] Anything else you wanted to add to that, Sara? Or we can move on to the next question, which sorry, I think you're on meeting. And did you want to try? Oh, I.

**Sarah Martin** [00:46:07] Was going to say is I'm pretty sure, but I don't have the details on me. But the government has also set up a separate process for looking at appointees indicating that there may be a review of how that occurs. So that's sort of a process happening independent later to the new NEC, which you've got to get into the NAC of calling it.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:46:30] A matter of calling it the NEC. If I can just ask, in addition to that, and harkening back to our five secret ministries, Pauling, that we kicked off with, I've got a question here from Alan that says, Will there be a formal enquiry into the \$18 million grant to the Governor-General's Future Ladies Fund? Has there been any news on that? I know the Prime Minister, Sarah kept kind of putting that issue to the side, but what about that specific idea of the grant?

**Sarah Martin** [00:47:00] So in terms of a separate enquiry, there's no news on that. But there has been a move in Parliament to disallow the grant to the Leadership Foundation. Obviously there's still a lot of question questions about how that what this this charity will actually do. You know, we don't we don't have any information about it's it's remit or it's plans. So it's all been sort of cloaked in mystery. So both the Greens, the Jacqui Lambie Network and Nick Ryan have all lodged notices of motion to disallow the special grant for this, you know, non-operational leadership programme. So it sort of became clear, I think late last week or in fact I think the Sunday paper had a story about the fact that this could actually be stopped. So that's sort of the moving part at the moment in terms of whether there's any further enquiry, not at this stage. I suspect that the Government will be very happy to disallow this grant given the state of the budget and the \$18 million is not nothing. But I guess it depends on how willing they are to upset the Governor-General.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:48:20] Yeah, I had another question in here that I've lost now about the Greens proposal to oppose interest rate rises. But I was actually interested, Sarah Moore, in the Greens proposal from last week that said I think it was Steve Price into orbit about the idea of pausing rent rises. Housing is such a huge issue in Australia. I'm sure it got a mention at the jobs summit. A lot of workers can't afford to buy houses close to where they need to live. As one example of why we've got a skills shortage in housing. How much do you think we're going to see anything in the budget related to housing? And how do you think that proposal went down in general in politics? Steve Price was pretty aghast, but anyone who's renting, I'm sure, thought it sounded like a good idea.

**Sarah Martin** [00:49:15] Well, it's a really big issue. And also, I thought it was pretty extraordinary. And I don't know if this was the same interview, but the interview whether the landlord was outraged by the proposal and then revealed he had 283 investment properties. So, yeah, look, I think I think it is a bit of a winner. Rental rights are a huge problem. We're having a situation where the stress in the housing market is leading to people, lots of no fault evictions, and that's obviously hugely problematic. And there's a lot of interrelated problems in this space. You know, one of which is clearly the impact of short term rentals like Airbnb is, and particularly in regional areas. I think Hobart is one of the most affected markets by that phenomenon. So there's lots of problems here. There is a meeting of the State and Territory housing ministers this week and Julie Collins has indicated she wants to do more in this space in addition to the Government's commitment on social housing. The new Greens member, Max Chen, the mother, is really quite impressive in noisy stuff in this space and has been pushing the government really hard on this area. And yesterday asked a question in question time of Albanese about rental, the rental affordability and the problems in that sector. And there was a very tone deaf joke from Albo in response about living in public housing. So I think I think they're there, you know, they these issues are resonating. There's been some interesting analysis done on the election outcome. And in those seats where there's high levels of renters and how that perhaps influenced the election outcome, we know that in. You know, some of those green seats. There's a high number of renters and people want to pop up, which is great because he probably has some actual, you know, quantitative data rather than just my thought bubbles to back this up. So let's hear what you have to say.

**Peter Lewis** [00:51:14] This is when he moved back to the office, and I was just signalling that I wanted to run off the back of that Iraq and that rent, rental rights and rental caps is the kitchen table economic issue for under thirties. And we talk a lot about day to day politics rather than performative politics as being really important for parties. I think this is a really rich find. You know, in New South Wales online we've got a waiting list of 50,000 for social housing affordability going through the roof and real issues around people being able to, you know, live near where they work. So I don't think any sort of politics to date has seen the potential for this. But you can see the way the Greens are starting to articulate it as, you know, kitchen table economics rather than as something you go out and campaign for. And I think it's going to be a sleeper of this term of government.

**Sarah Martin** [00:52:12] And also fun fact the federal government has previously introduced a rent freeze after after World War after World War Two. I think in middle of wartime inflation, there was a there was a rent freeze put in place. So it's not unprecedented.

**Peter Lewis** [00:52:29] And particularly with things like negative gearing, I assume, off the table forever. But all the tax concessions for property owners, the whole idea that capital is a class of income that shouldn't be taxed, whereas income, of course, should be. There is there is a rich bind to be tapped here by smart policy and smart politics.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:52:50] Yeah. And I did think just watching that one interview on the project, Max La mesa, I had a real instinct. I'm sure he's been campaigning on it for four years now, but he had all the answers at the ready and stiff press is kind of throwing different things at him and pointing out, you know, how much rents have increased by already have increased a lot for landlords. And couldn't we just pause it there for a bit after they've had that big increase in rents for a while and yeah, a really potent hip pocket issue I think going forward. But 50,000 on the waiting list in New South Wales. I mean the sheer scale of that is kind of but why do you.

**Peter Lewis** [00:53:32] Why you get on the queue and it's a ten year wait. So there and you know we've got a state election here coming up at this stage, neither side of politics is really coming to the party on the issues. But, you know, in a way, the social housing case is it's often portrayed as just a welfare piece, but it actually interrupts the entire market because if you move a bunch of people that are in the rental market into supported rent, then you're, you know, you're you're pushing downward pressure on the rental prices, which sort of works its way up the entire system our policymakers have normally dealt by housing affordability, by giving rich kids a bit more money to get their first home a better life. So many more people out of the equation.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:54:16] Yeah. Sarah, just quickly, a question from Ava Cox here. Will Albo take on the massive privatised childcare services and aged care or just give more money to profit makers? What are we expecting after the jobs summit and anticipating the budget? There's been pressure to bring forward the childcare reforms, but they're kind of been ruling that out as far as I can see. But that's not an issue that's going away there. How much do we think they're going to make headway on childcare?

**Sarah Martin** [00:54:49] Well, I think the Government's been pretty clear, particularly in the context of the summit, that there's very little chance that they'll bring forward the childcare policy from July to January. You know, the government has you know, it's a big reform, don't get me wrong. But it's obviously further discussion in terms of, you know, eventually getting to a universal free childcare access system. Jim Chalmers has so and Albanese have both said look, you know the budget we just can't, we can't afford it basically as is, is what they're saying despite the despite them arguing also that this is a productivity investment, that you know, it will ultimately benefit the budget. Jim Chalmers has said that's not how the budget sees it when you're eight weeks from a budget. So

come come October 25th. I don't expect we're going to see much change on that front, nor are we likely to see any change in the people. Expansion of the parental leave scheme. And they were really the two key demands from women's groups at the Jobs and Skills Summit. So I think it was disappointing to many of those groups that there wasn't any further action on that. We know that in terms of, you know, what they are going to do with childcare and aged care. In aged care we say that we have had some legislation through the Parliament, but the next big thing is really going to be the decision on on wages for aged care workers and the government obviously having agreed to fund that. There's still a lot of, you know, a lot to be worked out with the aged care sector, about the 24 seven nursing commitment and also the increased number of minutes which the government has agreed to. So there's still a lot a lot to happen in that space. I think going back to Pete's point about that, you know, they have a pretty full agenda at this point. So I suspect they're going to be pretty busy delivering on their election commitments as it is. Yeah, I don't see that they're going to sort of bite off more than they can chew and sort of start tackling some of those issues that the sort forgotten Eva, the questioner raised. So, yeah, I think I think that I think particularly Anika Wells, I think her plight is pretty full at the moment.

**Ebony Bennett** [00:57:09] Yeah, understandably. But if people are interested in I guess how Australia is going to meet those growing public spending needs, increasing the pay of the aged care and caring workforces in general that are highly feminised. If you're one of the people who cared about those stage three tax cuts questions at the beginning, don't forget to head on over to the Australia Institute. We've got a revenue summit in Canberra on the 6th of October. Earlybird tickets are on sale now and the objective of that really is to just say we do have growing public spending needs, a lot of services that the community now expects. And we seem to talk a lot about what we can't afford. How about we have a bit of a chat about how we could afford it, how we could fund the services that the community expects and needs. Thank you so much to Sarah and to Bill for joining us today. You can find Sarah Martin on Twitter at Mes Matto. Pete Lewis is at Peter Lewis, AMC. Bill Brown is at Brown 90. That's Brown with an eight on the end. And you can find me at Ebony Underscore Bennett thanks everyone for your great questions. Don't forget to head on over to Essential to play along at home with those essential polling results, you can find all the Australia Institute's content and research at Australia Institute dot org today. And of course Sarah and Pete's excellent analysis is at Guardian Australia. Head on over to there to find all of that. Thanks so much for joining us today. We'll see you hopefully next week for our webinars with the Pacific leaders as well as Andrew Quilty about the fall of Afghanistan. And thanks so much for joining us today. Take care, everyone. We'll see you next time.

**Peter Lewis** [00:58:56] All right.