

Poll Position

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In conversation with

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Ebony Bennett [00:00:03] Gday, everyone. I'm Ebony Bennett, deputy director at the Australia Institute and welcome to pole position our fortnightly catch up on all things federal politics as well as the latest results in The Guardian Essential Poll. I want to begin by acknowledging that I live and work on Ngunnawal and Ngambri country. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land and I want to pay my respects to the traditional owners and to elders. Past and present days and times for our webinars do vary. So head on over to Australia Institute dot org dot AEW to find all our upcoming webinars and also to check out things like our podcast, like follow the money, which you can find the latest episode of wherever you normally listen to podcasts. A couple of tips to make sure today runs smoothly. You can type in questions for our panel in the Q&A box. You can also upvote and upvote other people's questions and comments on them as well. A reminder to please keep things simple and on topic in the chat. And lastly, a reminder that this is being recorded. It will go up on our YouTube channel later this afternoon and it will pop up on Guardians Australian Politics podcast tomorrow morning. For those of you listening from the Pod, you can find all the latest essential poll results. Essential Report Dot dot AEW. So we're very excited because Murph Drew is back from writing her quarterly essay. We're very pleased to see her. And as always, Katherine, it is been a massive fortnight. Federal politics. Last week, the Attorney General introduced the National Anti-Corruption Commission legislation to Parliament long in the making. National Cabinet scrapped the isolation requirements for COVID, which will begin I think from mid October. The budget is of course fast approaching and before that the Australia Institute's Revenue Summit, which will be this Thursday, and bringing with it I think a lot more talk about scrapping or amending at the very least the stage three tax cuts which are just become the whipping boy for everything that can't be afforded in the budget, as well as things like the need for a windfall profits tax. So that economic debate is really heating up. And of course, Pete Lewis from Essential Media here to unpack all the figures with us as well. Thank you, Katherine and Pete. Katherine, first of all, to you, it's been a while since we've seen it. We've missed you. We tried not to do anything too exciting while you're away. But as I mentioned, you know, there's been a fair bit happening. How's it feel being back on deck?

Katharine Murphy [00:02:47] Well, a little bit strange. Yep. In truth, I've been sitting in a, well, not a dark room because it's hard to write words in a dark room without sort of destroying your eyesight

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even more. But I have been sitting at a very quiet place, writing a lot of words about the Prime Minister and the and the consequences of the election results. So I'm still getting my land legs back pipes in terms of what's actually happening on a day to day basis. But as usual, it has given you the good oil or what has occurred over the last fortnight. The sort of anti-corruption commission's a really key milestone I think, for the Government, for the crossbench and for, dare we say, the voters who voted for it. So obviously it's it's got to be the only thing I'd say about it at this point. I mean, obviously there are some highly respectable arguments about detail, particularly the issue of whether hearings occur in public and what what the terms are for those public hearings, all of that to play out. I would just say one thing procedurally the Albanese Government has been very clear it wants this passed by the end of the year. I look at sitting back at my desk after five weeks away and looking at the parliamentary sitting calendar, I'm thinking to myself, my God, there is a lot of business that this Parliament has to get through in in the closing sitting weeks of this year. Now, I'm not suggesting that I think it's not going to happen. I think it'd be more likely that the government had put on an extra sitting week or two than just say, Oh, look, we did our best, but we can't quite manage to get that through. I'm just saying that as a watch this space to our regulars, that seems to me there's a lot of business to get through between now and the end of the year. So then at CIG why now to the budget and stage three, which are set up. Yeah. Look today I think it's Tuesday of course isn't it. Yes. So we're three weeks away from budget day today, three weeks to go, three weeks to kick off. And obviously this will be the Albanese Government's first budget. The first budget of a new Government is generally a pretty critical document both economically and politically. In terms of stage three. Yeah. Look, there's a real head of steam building around that package. These tax cuts, not exclusively, but predominantly benefit high income earners. We've had a really astonishing pirouette in London over the last 24 hours where the new British Prime Minister, Liz Truss, had a similar tax cut package to the one being proposed in Australia and was basically shouted down by her own people, the financial markets and the IMF, and has had to do a very inelegant pirouette and dump the package. It'll be interesting to see whether or not those events give the new government a bit of cover, to think about whether or not the stage three tax cuts will proceed as legislated or not. I detect the beginning of a debate in the government about it. I think if we look closely at what the Treasurer has said, particularly over the last week, I think his language has shifted in relation to this issue. He's still saying, well, we, you know, you saw what we said at the election of the stage three tax cuts of course, and then proceeded to make a quite PC and compelling case for why they shouldn't proceed with them, basically. So we've got to see how that plays out. Obviously there was a debate in the Labour Party in opposition prior to the legislation of these tax cuts about whether or not they should be supported or not. That basically ended up with Labour playing a bit of ME2 with the Morrison government. At that point it did not want another election fought on tax, having just lost the 2019 election on a death tax that didn't exist. So you can understand why the new government is very touchy about matters tax. And obviously if the Labour Party shifts on stage three, there is no ifs or buts about this. It would be a broken election promise. They told the voters prior to the election that that package would proceed as legislated. But look, substantively, you know, these tax cuts were a bad idea when they were legislated. They have become a worse idea since in terms of the general economic conditions, seems to be even though these tax cuts don't stop for a couple more years. It's a brave government indeed. When we're standing basically on the precipice at the moment of the third major economic downturn in 12 years, that you would respond to that risk by punching a hole in your tax base. That seems to me to be not the smartest policy move. But I think it's also important though to emphasise that the Prime Minister has been very, very clear since the election about election promises and the primacy of election promises. We saw a whole debate about ambition in climate policy. A lot of people wanted the Labour Party to shift to

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a more, well, more ambitious emissions reduction target for 2030 because that's what the science would suggest needs to happen. They didn't they have their election commitment very tightly. And, you know, will they on the stage through tax cuts, will? That's going to be a really interesting story, I reckon, over the next three weeks to see how that pans out.

Ebony Bennett [00:08:38] Yeah. Is that your sense that there's a big debate there to be had now? It seems like for a long time there was they were not for turning, so to speak. And now there seems to be wiggle room.

Peter Lewis [00:08:50] Yeah, I feel like we might be in the middle of spitballing next fortnight's questions even as we are going over this week's I. I've got two things to add to this. The first is that I reckon as long as we call them stage three tax cuts, they're going to be very hard to get rid of. And I am interested in whether people have a different view, if we call it for what it actually is, which is a flattening of our progressive tax system in a way that has never been contemplated over the last hundred years. And that might be a bit push call it, but we can find. You know, I do think the framing of tax cuts is the very, very hard bit. I totally supported Labour not engaging in this before the election, but I am curious about whether there will be an appetite for a broken promise. I think there's a few moving pieces here. One is the position of cross-benches and tails. Another is, you know, the drain for labour, I think is if the tails could create a sense from the Liberals that they're going to be exposed if they keep pushing for these changes to the tax system to benefit that the highly paid as well. But. I think I said it a fortnight ago. So let me say it to Catherine, because I assume everyone else was here. That is the bigger risk to break the promise or keep the promise. And that's going to be the rubric like we know how iconic broken promises reinforce. The worst stereotypes of politicians. So I think the only way you get through this is in a call and response situation where the government is responding for pressure not to flatten the tax system, which I think is kind of what's happened in Britain. I you're right. The economics is stupid, Bay. It is totally against the principles of the society that we thought we were living in and has been living in for quite a long time. And third, it is a magic pudding of everything that people want Labour to do. They can blame the bloody stage three tax cuts for the race and they can't get their pet project up. And of course there is an amplification of that because you can only spend that money once. But it's a lot of money to spend.

Ebony Bennett [00:11:19] It is a lot of money to spend. And you're absolutely right about that call and response, because at the moment, the call and response is people are calling for funding for various things and the Treasurer is like, well we inherited a really tight budget position, we can't afford to do all of those things and people immediately like, well, we can't afford to do that. How can we afford these these tax cuts?

Katharine Murphy [00:11:40] Can I just inject one thought, though, into that? I agree with both of you diagnostic. But the thing about this shift, even if they execute it right, and I would put that as an eve at this point because like I said, the dialogue, I mean, Pete's formulation is a very good one. What's the most risky thing? Take the promise or break it. And that crystallises the question very

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neatly, because it's it's not cost free. I don't mean in budget sense. I'm talking politically. That's why the either road you take, it's not cost free. Right. But in any event, they shift. I agree. What one of the pressures at the moment, this is why we've seen such unanimity around a bunch of very respectable interest groups who are all, you know, basically coming to the new government because of this pent up demand riding on what's happened over the last ten years. Now we've got real problems starting to manifest in social services, in health, in universities and in all kinds of spaces. Right. That require public investment in order to fix these problems. So it's all this pent up demand. Everybody's coming saying what I need to do is actually really important. We need to find the resource resources to do it. But if they do shift on stage three, the way this will be sold to the public and not, I mean, as a bit of flimflam or spin. I mean, the reason they'll do it is there is a fiscal buffer exercise, right? We are I don't I don't want to bring us all down. I don't want to be Eeyore so early in this week's episode. I'm just saying we are the global economic position at the moment is genuinely dicey. Right. There is a very high probability that the US goes into recession because the Fed is just begging these interest rate rises. Right. The bluntest of blunt instruments to this very large economy. It's. The US looks on the path to a recession at this point in time. One of the reasons the the reaction in Britain was so visceral to this unfunded tax cut package on the part of trust and who knew Chancellor was the prevailing economic conditions? Right. If Labour shifts course on these, it'll be an exercise in trying to rebuild some fiscal buffers to basically have some room to move in the event of a downturn here. So I wouldn't necessarily say that not proceeding with the tax cuts automatically, you know, sort of unleashes buckets of money for various important causes because I think it'll be solved presented as a precautionary principle. Now, obviously, economic conditions might be quite different in 12 months time or 18 months time possibly. If we've got the worst sort of global situation and there is another downturn, we come down and we come back up, right? In which case, obviously, growth improves the budget bottom line. That creates fiscal room for progressive priorities. I'm just I'm just adding that layer of disclaimer or nuance because that's my feeling. If they shift and everyone had the if in that sentence, I hope if they shift. I think it'll be the whole budget will will shift to a rebuilding the fiscal buffers exercise.

Ebony Bennett [00:15:18] Yeah. Which makes sense facing down a potential recession when you've already got quite a lot of debt. And basically this wouldn't, as you said, be paying for things prospectively going forward. They haven't even come in yet. It is that exercise not only in some buffer room, but just protecting budget revenues like this, a big hole in budget revenues permanently. Particularly if we're in dire straits and we need to. Keynesian economically, you know, fiscal stimulus our way out of a potential recession.

Katharine Murphy [00:15:54] You've got to shore up the tax base in order ahead in order to have fiscal firepower. Right. And I may not need it, but you need to you basically need to harden the tax base in order to give yourself room to move. When debt levels are at or at their current level, like it's costing us a lot of money to service the interest on this borrowing. Now, the government, of course, should have borrowed during COVID. They should have done what they did, saved a lot of businesses, saved a lot of lives. I'm not now all of a sudden turning into a sort of, you know, oh, well, that was a wasted spending, which is the government's line, by the way. Which is which is rubbish. It wasn't all wasted spending. It was some of it was actually very important and unprecedented, really, for a for a coalition government. But anyway, we do actually need to get on to the numbers at some

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point and stop writing about these. But it is fascinating. But it's sort of got it's got a few layers, right? And so I think people need to be a bit attentive to all the layers because that will influence the decision making.

Ebony Bennett [00:17:00] Yeah, no, it's a very good point. But having said that, let's dive into the numbers. Let's see if I can make this work. Here we go. Pate.

Peter Lewis [00:17:12] So I've never, never asked this question before. Perceptions of the future for humanity. And it's a total indulgence on the part of the pollster, because I've just been reading this fantastic book, which I commend to everyone by a moral philosopher called William MacAskill, who's written a book called What We Are the Future. And given that I do polling, I thought I could flesh out some of his ideas with a few questions in this week's report. So McCaskill's proposition is that if we want to think about long termism, we're not talking about the next election cycle. We're not talking about our kids or even our grandkids. If you accept science and avoiding an extinction catastrophe which is not off the cards, humanity's likely to go for at least another million years. So rather than us being in the end of days, we're at the very beginning of the journey. And his book is really fascinating because it's an invitation for people to really practise long term thinking. So I was interested just in asking people, well, and we didn't go to the median time frame because it does kind of fry your brain a bit when you try to even think like that. Although again, MacAskill gives you some good tools to think through long termism just ten, 100,010 thousand years, whether people think things will be better or worse. And for those listening to the podcast that can't see the graphs. So in ten years we are on balance worse off 4233, with 25% unsure in 100 years, we still think we're worse off. But there's more of a sun onshore. It's 39 worse, 28 better, 32 onshore. Then you get to a thousand years when the only person in this room that's remembered is Saint Catherine, 36, worse, 22 better, 42 onshore, and then 10,000 years, it's still worse, 35% worse, 20 better and 45% unsure. What does this all mean? It means that the Jetsons are probably going to happen. There's not it, at least in our view. There's not a positive future that we are setting up. And I'll apologise for the indulgence, but it's been in my mind right through the last weakness, this beautiful quote, MacAskill writes, which is due to the very long term consequences of our actions. Fire bite out over time like ripples on a pond. No rather every year like clumsy gods, we radically change the course of history. So I've been writing all this stuff and amusing over it. When two things happened last week, which we have also asked questions on which I will get to in a sec. But one was the Optus data breach, which is the lived experience of the data extraction economy, and Professor Ed Santos model law on facial recognition technology. We'll get into those in a sec. EBS just brought up the next slide again for those who are listening on the part of central report dot com dot I year we don't think we we don't think the government's doing enough at 43%. But if you look at those trend lines down from 62% when Scott went to Hawaii in the middle of the bushfires. 32% doing enough. 13% doing too much. Most of those are meeting at CPAC over the weekend and 12% don't know. But what? Back to MacAskill. What's interesting is he's a young academic, I think from Oxford. He's a Scotsman. Again, I commend his book to it. He says that the chances are humanity in some form will get through a climate of enabling a nuclear, that there will be humanity surviving. He's real concern in terms of the happiness or otherwise for the future is the speed to which we reach what is called automated general intelligence, where the AI becomes self-learning. Because his analysis is that systems that thrive into the future and give us a prosperous future will have the requisite diversity and friction to

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deal with different circumstances. So the real concern around the way that we are building a data economy and around collecting information and training machines to predict what we're going to do next is you take away that friction, you take away that space to deal with crises. So if you want to click a couple of slides forward. AB, I hope I'm flying. This isn't really politics, is it, that I find it very interesting. So back to the here and now got I've.

Katharine Murphy [00:21:47] Got to chase up this book now.

Peter Lewis [00:21:48] Now it's a ripper and I'll put a link into it the chat later. There's actually a link through my guardian piece today actually to the book and I did commit it. So we are concerned at our information being scanned at the moment. We're concerned about our bank accounts and whether or not. Interesting. We did ask people if they had been part of the up to scratch and that the numbers go up 10% as opposed to others in terms of very concerned. But you know, we're all getting scam emails and texts and God knows what's going on with our social media identity, but that's leading to support. It's still reasonably lukewarm for regulation. So 51% support for tightening up the amount of personal information companies can collect about us. 46 Tightening up the amount of personal information government collect about us. And then there's large numbers of I'm don't know, and only about a quarter of people feeling, saying they feel comfortable about it and then slightly less, but still majority support for regulating the use of facial recognition technology. So before we round this out and I realise this is very nice at the moment, there are reforms to privacy law proposals sitting on the Attorney-General's desk. We have not updated our privacy laws in any meaningful way for 40 years. The proposals talk about expanding the definition of personal information, about tightening up what consent looks like, but also about creating courses of action so that if you are breached, you can actually take action against those that haven't handled your information securely. And then the second part, which is the model law that the UTS academics released last week, would be that high impact uses of facial recognition should basically be heavily regulated to the extent the regulator can look under the bonnet at how it works. So both with privacy and facial recognition technology in their eyes, meaningful reform. Sitting on the desk of our mild mannered attorney general, who I dub in this case the Michael J. Fox of Australian politics, because he does have the opportunity with these laws to shape what happens next in the kind of reverse time machine that's going.

Katharine Murphy [00:24:14] To tell it, like.

Peter Lewis [00:24:14] It's about.

Katharine Murphy [00:24:15] Family ties. Michael J.

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Peter Lewis [00:24:17] Fox No, no, no, no more, not no more. Back to the future, Mark. Which I thought, you know, I'll take anyone. And that's just the data breach. You don't need to go there. So there you go. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Ebony Bennett [00:24:29] There's quite a bit to unpack from those.

Peter Lewis [00:24:32] You reckon?

Ebony Bennett [00:24:35] I mean, yeah. I hadn't given much thought to what life will be like in 10,000 years, but it's an interesting exercise. I'm actually a bit surprised at the optimism of people a hundred years from now. Perhaps they don't rate as much climate research as Catherine and I might go.

Peter Lewis [00:24:53] Oh yeah. Or Cormac McCarthy and McCarthy.

Katharine Murphy [00:24:59] Exactly. To get the IPCC right.

Ebony Bennett [00:25:02] Mike McCarthy But Pete, I did want to talk about that up just a bit more because yeah, we're kind of obviously we're, we're way behind. But it does seem to me that it is only when it's quite personal to people and it's something as, I don't know, personal as you Medicare card and your passport number that it really does hit home how much these documents are essentially your passport into the digital world, into shopping and setting up utilities, all of that kind of stuff now.

Peter Lewis [00:25:33] Yeah, well, this is the obvious and window I think that's just opened for regulators. So we've been banging on and probably putting on my Centre for Responsible Technology had here. We've been banging on for the need for improved data privacy laws for a long time and everyone just yawns. But when you receive a night from a phone company that you might not have been a customer for for a number of years, saying, Oh, by the way, we've been holding your Medicare and driver's licence and someone's got it and we don't know what they've got in through picking the lock or just we left the door open. It kind of does chime them on a little bit. And I think that the really interesting, you know, and I've been watching the way the debate has rolled out over the last week. And what's been really interesting is just people going, wait, what? They're holding back for that long and. There's obviously a couple of moving pieces here. One is that there has been requirements to register, particularly mobile phone users because of crime, money laundering, all that sort of stuff. More broadly, we really changed the way we looked at privacy after 911 terror attacks and government convinced us, I think, and convinced convinced the Internet companies that we use that it was in our interest for people to track Web Web movement and collect more and more information. And then out of that came the companies themselves going, Oh,

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gee, we could make a lot of money ourselves if we could follow people around the Internet and knew what they liked. And then from there, we've ended up in a world where that's become the business model of the social media platforms and in a different place. All right. Last week, I did ask the question whether the the cures become worse than the diseases we were trying to solve in the first place. Given that, I think the that the risks, the demonstrable risk to technology on the business models the major platforms have sorry, the major risk to democracy, the technologies is doing fine is probably greater than the terror threat that it was originally set to to cure. So.

Ebony Bennett [00:27:37] Yes, certainly, if you look at some of those Facebook revelations about the the way Facebook has been used in Myanmar and Yemen and America, young girls.

Peter Lewis [00:27:50] Everywhere. So I just think that we do have a moment maybe to reset. The really interesting thinking in this space is being pushed by actually Tim Berners-Lee, who was the father of the Internet, who is pushing for Web 3.0, where instead of us handing our data over, we would have our own personal online data identity that we give people access to and they never hold it. They just get get amok. And it seems to me that again, that still felt a bit sci fi. But given where we are at the moment, I think there's also been a breach of Telstra customers just by the way that's been announced today. I haven't had a look at that yet.

Ebony Bennett [00:28:24] The other half of the population.

Peter Lewis [00:28:26] Yeah, yeah. My, what about bona fide anyway? But it might be a time to stop fast for forwarding those sorts of conversations about how we can create true data sovereignty as individuals. And back to McCaskill's point, to create a more diverse system that isn't being pushed into a single ritual system, but one that is maintaining the diversity that might give us a history 10,000 years down the track.

Ebony Bennett [00:28:55] Yeah, Catherine, I don't want to jump off of that far ahead, but it does strike me that the attorney general, it seemed like, you know, the Treasurer has got the budget coming. Chris Bowen was fairly out of the gates with the 4.3% legislation. The AG has got the iconic legislative legislation that he introduced last week. Those are doing that review of IATA and the political appointments that kind of messed up that system. And now we've got this catch up really on on data. I mean the Government's got its work cut out for it.

Katharine Murphy [00:29:33] I mean, I was trying to make that point just in relation to the parliamentary sitting calendar, which is sort of a manifestation of it, but it's kind of like, Oh my God, it's like I sometimes look at them a big it's like the firehose of the last ten years. It's just been opened up onto them. It's sort of like, God, there's all these things that need doing and and then you get into a sort of bandwidth issue in terms of the government, right? Like how, how quickly can humans process information and move? So it's tricky, you know, but all of these things are urgent and

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important. I think the sort of big conundrum I've said in relation to the the numbers that we just went through and again, if you're listening to the go to the website and have a look at the charts that that'll make this conversation a bit more comprehensible. I think you saw those numbers were a bit low. I actually thought they were quite high only from the the sort of starting proposition that I think a whole lot of the sort of digital privacy debate is a is an it is a divide amongst engaged people. For starters, I think there's a whole bunch of Australians who have no idea to what extent surveillance capitalism is part of their lives. And also so you've got like perhaps, you know, sort of cohort of not very engaged Australians who don't realise the amount of the amount of data, their personal data they're trading away, and also how much they tracked online by all kinds of corporations. Right. So there's that cohort. Then we've got a cohort of young people who socialise by social media. Ironically, anyone see the connexion? You sort of don't sort of see the whole concept of privacy is sort of anachronistic, right? They've they've grown up in this environment where. Everything is everything is is public, everything is online. Everything is sort of posted to social media and shared amongst groups of friends or wider groups. Right. So their sort of starting proposition on privacy is quite different to the, you know, the privacy that, you know, we might think about or others others listening to these conversations. So sort of culturally like, you know, young people who are much more fluent about this stuff care less about it. So then it becomes, what's the call to action like? What's the rallying point? What's the thing that kind of tips over into this being something that really inconveniences you or where, you know, privacy becomes an identity like like the others, you know, important components of identity that young people are particularly motive motivated by. Right. So I don't know. I don't know.

Peter Lewis [00:32:18] I've always found privacy a really boring, hard thing to even as a political campaign to get excited about. But I do think there is something around giving people control of their identity that might might get us there. But just to round out that discussion, the last thing is they're going to say they're going to put something in about privacy maybe by the end of the year. The real concern is they just increase the penalties and not do any of the structural stuff that's really important has been kicked down the road forever. So that's the bit that I'm sure people like you, Catherine, will be looking at carefully as as this debate matures.

Ebony Bennett [00:32:55] Well, it might be time just about to go to questions from the audience. Don't forget, you can type those in to the Q&A box and they'll jump up here for us. James Bannon has said, why is that? Yeah. What's the feeling about the government scrapping the stage three tax cuts? I do feel like we've gone into that in a fair bit of detail at the beginning.

Katharine Murphy [00:33:20] About five fathoms deep into that.

Ebony Bennett [00:33:23] Yeah. Are they waiting to be forced? I feel like, yes. The government had promised and and now it's really up to the community. We've had this conversation in the past to create the space for them to shift on them.

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Peter Lewis [00:33:39] Yeah, I think the government wants to see be seen to be listening and responding if they do. But I, I do also take Kathryn's point from earlier that probably magic pudding politics isn't the answer either. But, you know, it's it's a choice between I guess, and we're repeating ourselves now. It's a choice between whether it is a framing of delaying or deferring tax cuts, which is really, really hard or just kind of reopening, you know, the fast impact they really need to wave through a flattening of the tax system before the last.

Ebony Bennett [00:34:15] Or I feel like they could just rely on the economics, you know, like the changing circumstances there are dramatic.

Peter Lewis [00:34:21] Does anyone know what happened when the devil went down to Georgia? Did Robert Johnson end up like we did?

Katharine Murphy [00:34:27] The Duma at the crossroads didn't.

Peter Lewis [00:34:29] But what happened? Did he? What did he go to hell?

Katharine Murphy [00:34:32] Oh, God, I don't know.

Ebony Bennett [00:34:34] I feel like he sold his soul. But maybe I've just watched this.

Peter Lewis [00:34:36] Is this sloppy? The next culminated in some research anyway.

Katharine Murphy [00:34:40] Well, we don't want to run.

Peter Lewis [00:34:41] Banjo necks out.

Katharine Murphy [00:34:42] Not about stage three. We did. We did. We got exhausted. Grateful for the question. But the only other thing, though, to emphasise again is that, look, I think look, I think the stage three tax cuts are bad policy and they were bad policy when Labour signed up to them prior to the election. And you know, I think the sensible thing is given circumstances have changed demonstrably that Labour should decouple from them. But, but, but I'm kind of uncomfortable about it as well because it's sort of like, as, as a journalist, you know, bang, bang on ad nauseum, the extent of, you know, sending writers sleep about the importance of integrity and accountability. I think election promises are part of it. So it's sort of I think it's I think it is genuinely difficult, that's all. Yeah.

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Ebony Bennett [00:35:32] Just well here on tax. The next question is from John Knox, who asks about could the government be convinced to reform negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions in the context of it? Difficult for first bank, difficult for first home buyers? I feel like there's less appetite and public discourse around that at the moment, Catherine, but it strikes me that the housing crisis essentially could again send the government back to the drawing board on a whole range of things, including those concessional arrangements that make housing basically something for investors instead of having to live in.

Katharine Murphy [00:36:12] Portable for, you know, young people and a lot of older people as well. Yeah, look, I think the way they'll they'll approach the general issue of the tax system and can say. Is via some sort of policy work really over this term and seek to sort of develop a set of propositions that they can take to the voters in the next election. I don't I don't think on those areas of concessions and all the really tricky areas that it'll be one of those, you know, surprise situations, I think I think there's a whole and and I confess, I thought this is how they deal with stage three to I thought that they would lock in behind stage three and they still might. Right do it this way. But they had said in trying some policy work over the course of this term where you could go and seek a mandate basically to do this, that and the other thing that would be more sensible in a policy sense, and I would certainly put those concessions that our questioner is flagging in that basket.

Ebony Bennett [00:37:11] Mm hmm. The next question I've got is around the Voice, and it says, While the voice has widespread support in the community, there seems to be a growing trend of anti-choice speakers on talk shows and in the media. Will these evaporate or is the trend growing? Catherine, can I start off with you on that one?

Katharine Murphy [00:37:29] I just my blood just ran a little bit cold there. Yes. Look, it's it's it's the risk associated with this debate. We're not all kind of like a uni mind in the country about it. There are differences. Some differences are respectable, others less so. But there are differences both in the at the level of indigenous community and leadership and and also in the community beyond. And I think the Prime Minister has sort of tried well, I mean, he's grabbed the voice as a really important piece of unfinished business in the country. And and he's right about that. And he's tried to run with it and he's sort of trying in very typically Anthony Albanese fashion with this sort of degree of ambiguity. It's sort of fatigue ambiguity.

Peter Lewis [00:38:28] Well.

Katharine Murphy [00:38:30] You know, you might even be getting a preview of certain faces here. It's like he's sort of he's very he's very good at sort of when things get difficult. He you know, you can you can sort of crash through something or you can just sort of Eddie through it's like a little cloud and that is kind of like he does resort to that. So I think he's sort of up there at at Gama he

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sort of started the debate. It legitimised the debate. He said, look, reasonable proposition. But I you know, I don't want to preclude a discussion about this, blah, blah, blah, withdrawal. Right? Then obviously people come out, they have various things to say about it and the environment can get very choppy, particularly given, you know, our polling suggests that people, you know, are positively disposed, but they know bugger all about it. Not to put too fine a point on it. Ron, what is this change? What does it mean? So, you know, will it get worse? It's possible. You know, I hope not, but it's possible. I do think, though, you know, we like things to be neat and tidy. You know, we sort of we have these sort of unreasonable expectations sometimes of politics where we do two things, which we project is sort of West Wing sort of fantasy on it, you know, that it's all just, you know, it's all a grand plan and everybody's perfect and nobody makes mistakes, right? Which is obviously silly. So politics is the human business. It's messy. Messy stuff happens. It's a community where humans we're messy. We don't agree there will be debates. What does it mean for whether or not this carries or not? It's a bit too soon to say, I think and I think we might have discussed this on the show before. I think the Prime Minister's plan is a bit amber and be ambiguous. However, line up the Premier's cheque, line up a number of voices in corporate Australia, check, make it a sort of an issue of progress that a lot of people can rally around, check, put your earmuffs on, barrel through, hope for the best ad. And I think that's basically the plan. Again, we've got to see what will make this a lot easier is if the opposition gets on board and doesn't sort of play a Republican type public campaign role. But anyway, we will get to see how that all pans out. So that's a less than definitive, definitive answer that underscores the point about humans being messy. We don't know everything. We can't predict everything and people will disagree with one another. How does this story and don't know hope and ends will.

Peter Lewis [00:41:15] I've been thinking about the referendum a lot, and I just want to try one more thing, and that's been striking me. So we think referendums are the same as elections and I'm not sure if they are. So an election is very much vote for me. And it's a stage fight really in Australian politics between two sides to form government. I think one of the reasons referendums go down is that no cases tend to be run like an election and yes, cases are trying to create something different to an election, which is a sense of possibility to change the very structure of our Constitution. And if I think that's where the republic can movement was lost. We had the no case being run by the best negative campaigner of their generation in Tony Abbott. And we had the Yes case try to fight him in a cage fight or take the white out of it now. I'm watching the way that both. The Greens and the right are approaching the the voice with a very loud no voice as that kind of fight club version. We are against these and I say labour and elements of the opposition as well, just wanting to almost simplify the proposition out in a Zen like state. So I think I've said this before. I think. The way that the voice lands is that the statement that From the Heart was an invitation. The constitutional vote is an RSVP to say, Yep, we welcome Beijing, we welcome welcoming you into our our system. We are not prescriptive on the way that occurs because that will change over time. And we don't want to enshrine it in the Constitution because that would create a third chamber. But we want to put an obligation on the executive to to ensure that First Nations people are heard. Now. There's a couple of things that flow from that. The first is that the yes no isn't if it's a hit on contest, I think we lose or that those that want change lose. If we can find the space to broaden out the proposition and talk about the forward journey without getting caught up too much in the detail and basically trust our leaders and First Nations people to find a way to come together, then it will be a very different sort

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of campaign. Now, I might be being a little bit, you know, period there, I don't know. But I do know that that in that head on, it's really hot in history shot. It's really hard to get these cases up.

Katharine Murphy [00:44:03] Hmm.

Ebony Bennett [00:44:05] The next question that I've got is around the new National Anti-Corruption Commission, the NOC, and it says we need the. Well, it's not really a question. It's more of a statement. We need the ability to have public hearings and strong whistleblower protections in there, which a great and a lot of legal experts would agree with you there as well. Paul But Catherine, that is emerging as one of the really one of the only and won't be the only. There's always devil in the detail. But the kind of key area of contention, the one thing that's kind of new that wasn't flagged prior to the legislation being introduced and something that the attorney general himself in campaigning, you know, on this issue has really highlighted the importance of public hearings. And yet he's kind of put this really high bar that the NEC has to clear before it can hold them. Is that your sense of that's where the debate is going to be in this enquiry and on the legislation?

Katharine Murphy [00:45:12] Yeah, it'll be interesting to see sort of where it lands and certainly where the debate is. It'll be interesting to see where it lands because I suppose from a crossbench perspective they have got a bunch of things that they sought in relation to this model. Certainly not everything. And I'm not saying the public hearings are unimportant, quite the contrary. But they've emerged from this process of discussion with the government, with most of their wish list dealt with. Then there's the issue of public hearings. Now, I think the what the government is attempting to do, I think, is to try and get something that the whole parliament can vote for. And that might sound like why would you even bother? Right. Like the Scott Morrison promised for a whole term to bring in an integrity commission, did nothing, called it a fringe issue. You know, I said to journalists, why you asking me these pesky questions? Who needs that crap? Sort of right? Like, why would you even bother to deal with the coalition? I can understand. Some people would feel that way. I've said before, though, I think it actually would be quite important getting back to that bugbear that I've got about integrity and accountability, that I think it would be quite an important gesture actually if the Parliament of Australia could agree on a model for an anti-corruption commission. That isn't a joke, right? I think that would be quite an important milestone in our democracy, given where we are, given the history of given recent history. Right. It's a judgement call, of course. If you Mark Dreyfus how much you try to wait for that moment. Right. Obviously you don't want to try to weigh things that are really substantial in terms of the way this commission will operate. You don't do that because that's obviously, you know, even if you didn't care about the issue, you just and I think Mark Dreyfus as an imminent lawyer does care about the issues. But in terms of the politics, if you're a Labour and you campaigned on establishing an integrity commission, you do not want to be dragged down by the coalition to something suboptimal. Right. So it's a judgement call. It's a point in time judgement call about in a way you end up on that. So like I said, so stripping this back, I think that's the motivation predominantly. Can we get something that everybody can live with? Right. Liberal Party. Crossbench Labour and of course the major party internals on this issue is different to the internals in the Greens and the internals in terms of the

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crossbench. Right. There will be a spectrum of views in the Labour Party about about an integrity commission, how, how swingeing and sweeping it should be. And and we've seen the Coalition was paralysed for more than a term, it was unable to bring forward a proposition because there were there was a very big spectrum of views inside the Coalition about whether or not there should be an integrity commission at all. So it's sort of like an idea, again, is probably more detailed and then we all need that. I'm just I'm trying to sort of paint all of the moving parts for people. So because sometimes you can look at it, look at a set of propositions and think, gee, so how the hell did that happen? That makes no sense. And from the outside, sometimes it makes no sense. From the inside, though, there are always moving parts that are trying to be accommodated. Now, obviously, we'll see. I think I do think that's my gut feeling. They're going for this moment that the whole parliament can get behind. That then creates a judgement call on the crossbenches. Is this okay or not? Or is this a sort of fatal trade off? So far the crossbench has been very constructive on that point and then it's a case of whether or not Peter Dutton can keep the Coalition together on these too, or whether they start spinning off, you know, demanding all kinds of other things, right. In which case that'll kill the deal and Labour will pass this with the crossbench. So you know we've got a little way to go on this, but that's again, I'm trying to be explicit to people so that people understand that these are all the different elements I suppose.

Ebony Bennett [00:49:43] And if Peter Dutton has more or less that he thinks that gets the balance right and then the Government shifts on public hearings back to just in the public interest.

Katharine Murphy [00:49:53] Yeah.

Ebony Bennett [00:49:54] Is that enough then to think it does that. Totally throw it completely out of balance. Well that one thing.

Katharine Murphy [00:50:00] Well it's sort of, it's kind of it's like God, it's sort of view it, you know, it's sort of it's like an orchestra, you know, you've sort of got all these little elements that you've got to tune up, right? That it's all somehow got to fit together. Does it scuttle the whole thing? I mean, look, Dutton's got a political problem, right? Obviously, you know, the Liberal Party with, you know, suffered a colossal rout at the last election. Part of the reason for that was Morrison's incredible miscalculation on the Integrity Commission. Dutton, from his first press conference, has been trying to push the Coalition to a point where they will accept an integrity commission. Right. That's been obvious since the get go. So, you know, the Government's given Dutton a little bit of cover with his own people, just like if Dutton pushes the friendship and the whole balance of the orchestra shifts. So I think.

Peter Lewis [00:50:55] The.

Katharine Murphy [00:50:56] Next few ways.

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Peter Lewis [00:50:57] It feels that at the moment they've all. More to gain from agreeing than anyone has got from disagreeing. Sci fi tales land the big agenda item. Yes, Labour makes good its promise. The Coalition is not seen as being anti corruption. And yeah, it does. It does make me reflect on the different. I'm sure you go into this in your essay as well, Catherine, but the different theory of government like Labour is trying to take the heat out of the issue and land it that everyone can iron it. Whereas you could imagine the other side would have just been looking for the points of friction to exploit and amplify.

Katharine Murphy [00:51:43] Well, I think it's sort of. Yeah. And in this that's what I suppose on I'm I'm not saying to people I'm totally different about whether or not there's public hearings. Obviously a body like this needs public hearings because otherwise it will not have a public mandate. It will not have public confidence. Right. It needs to have public hearings. So that is in the public interest. Right. Politicians will want a high bar as the trail on when something is a public hearing and when it isn't. Because these bodies are not courts. Right. They're not they don't act in the same way as courts. So, you know, it's sort of a yeah, I think sort of institutional players in politics would like the moment of getting this thing done. You know, it's quite a strong body. You can argue about the public hearings, but it's quite a strong body. I think the point about whistleblowers that the questioner asked is actually really critically important. But you can deal with that separately to the Integrity Commission. I think that whole idea, if we don't strengthen protection for whistleblowers, it's a chicken and egg proposition. What is an I do without decent whistleblowers? And whistleblowers don't come forward without better protection. It's a very sound legal principle. So. But you don't necessarily have to do it all here, right. In this in this body anyway. It's it's probably far more explanation than we need. But I think the moment matters as a as a as a reporter on this institution, looking at the country that that I serve and this institution serves. I think getting that moment would be a good thing for the country if we can.

Ebony Bennett [00:53:20] Yeah, absolutely. And it's you know, as you said, it's something that the public demanded as well. Like we saw this was such a huge issue at the last election. We've been talking about a climate super majority, but there's an integrity super majority as well. So Parliament with a mandate on this issue and yeah, it's not going to fix all the problems, but it's a it's a good start and, you know, full credit to the attorney general for getting it the legislation to parliament within kind of the first six months. And really the fact that this kind of have we done enough to protect whistleblowers and the threshold for public hearings? Pretty much it's a it's a very strong start, you know, the legislation overall. But as you've said, Catherine, that is they are public hearings are important for actually driving corruption. That's one of the key functions of the commission. We probably only got time for one more question. I've got a few more stage three ones in here. A couple of questions about Liz Truss and that late addition. I'm just trying to think of something else in here that we perhaps haven't covered yet this morning. What have we got here from Jane, who asks about refugees and offshore detention and if there's been any movement? Well, it's really a comment again. But any movement around those issues with this new government and those those policy areas, I guess we've just been in a bit of a quagmire for a long time, Catherine. Yeah, well.

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Katharine Murphy [00:55:05] It's sort of because I'm just now actually just racking my brain. I'm sorry, because there's been so many moving parts. Obviously there was a discussion around this with the Barlow family. Labour's agenda I think's been pretty clear in terms of ending temporary protection visas and other things. I'm just not actually sure where all of that is up to. Just I'll just ask for forgiveness from the audience. I have been in a room for five weeks, so I'm a little bit I'm a little bit out of whack with some of the the other sort of moving parts. I'm not sure where that's up to.

Ebony Bennett [00:55:39] No worries. Well, we might come back to that and then just add a future pole position. And I guess just taking us back now to tax cuts and the budget coming up. I did just want to highlight that the Liz Truss, the UK situation because that's kind of plugged in at the last minute, but it does seem relevant to our, you know, our circumstances and the policy discussion that we're having. I guess the differences, although already legislated and there's were kind of, you know, there was a moment there with our introduce, which makes them a bit different.

Katharine Murphy [00:56:14] But it's an.

Ebony Bennett [00:56:17] Extraordinary start for this prime minister of the.

Katharine Murphy [00:56:20] UK. Well, I wondered when you said it, there was a question about Liz Truss whether or not the question was how does it how did Britain find a Prime Minister that made Boris Johnson look good? I wondered if that was the question. Well, I have found well, I mean, the likes of unique kind of genius, but there it is.

Peter Lewis [00:56:36] I reckon Jeremy Corbyn could have won that one anyway.

Katharine Murphy [00:56:40] It's, it's, it's just look, I don't know much about Liz Truss. I mean, I've obviously read a biography like others. Boris Johnson is a much more known figure in Australia than Liz Truss is. But God it's just extraordinary. And, and that that that. Look, I mean obviously I suppose in the, in the new Prime Minister's defence she would have been very focussed on winning the Tory leadership ballot and possibly less focussed on the policy that followed afterwards. Perhaps it's a bandwidth issue, but to be absolutely screamed down by your own people to the point where you, you know, I gather she did a whole bunch of pre-recorded radio interviews where she said she was standing by the package. And a lot of those pre-packaged radio interviews hit the news cycle in the morning when the tweet had brought out actually read reverse version. It's like it's pretty spectacular as we're unravelling go. There was a nice piece of commentary on the site this quickly in the Guardian overnight from People Korea. I think I have his surname correctly. She's my counterpart in the UK. In the UK. An obvious lie, but a good one. The the the the the comment piece was, it seems the lady was returning.

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Ebony Bennett [00:58:00] Well, we might leave it there. And, and I, for one, will be hoping that our Treasurer is returning on stage three in the Budget. But we'll pick up this conversation, I'm sure, in a fortnight from now. It's great to have you back. Catherine Murphy, thanks again, Pete Lewis for taking us through all the numbers and expanding our minds and our horizons for the next, you know, 10000 to 1000000 years. Well, we're going to check out that book.

Peter Lewis [00:58:25] Should be a party.

Katharine Murphy [00:58:26] Here we go. Turning up at the midnight session of 21 A Space Odyssey. This episode. Anyway.

Ebony Bennett [00:58:35] If people are interested in further reading on the National Anti-Corruption Commission, please head on over to our website at [Australia Institute dot org](https://www.australiainstitute.org). There you can find all kinds of stuff about how terrible stage three tax cuts are there as well. But thank you for tuning in. Thanks for all your questions and we'll hope to see you in a fortnight from now. And take care out there, everyone. We'll talk to you soon.