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Thankyou Rod very much for that very warm introduction, and to you too ladies and gentlemen for your warm welcome. I must say it's a great pleasure to be here in Sydney this evening but I'm enormously surprised at how many folk have turned out for tonight's event.

On the other hand I'm informed that this is a regular thing that you turn out in such numbers for this, so I'm amazed. I have to revise my eyes on the prize as they say in my business, which means, you know, revise the views you have. I originally grew up in Brisbane. I've only been in Melbourne for 20 years but one sort of envies the local atmosphere, and needless to say there are some things that are said about Sydney that aren't always complimentary. One of them is that you can't get the Sydney siders out after dark. Once they're back in their homes that's that. Well you've proved them dead wrong. When I said "That's a bit rough on our brothers and sisters in Sydney surely," the person then said to me, "Actually it's not the people in Sydney who are the problem, it's the people from Sydney." I'm not going to go any further. I'm from Brisbane...I'm neutral.

But can I say what a great pleasure it is to be here and Rod and to Martin and Jim and to others who organised this evening and Harry of course over there can I thank you very much indeed for the privilege of addressing this forum this evening.

I said I would talk about faith in Public Office, and I've chosen that topic because I have the enormous privilege, and it is a privilege although there are times when it's quite trying, particularly at the outset of my tenure as the Chairman of the Australian Fair Pay Commission you might recall some aspects of that were pretty trying for me.

I chose the topic because I think there are things I'd like to share with you this evening about the work of the Commission in particular, given the strong

emphasis of social justice of this group. And it's a privilege that I have to serve in that particular office: setting and adjusting minimum wages for our country. That is to say, the wages that are earned by the lowest paid members of our community. I'll talk to you a little bit about that. But to interleave that with some comments about my own Christian walk holding that office. I'd have to say that it has become much, much easier for me, among the many benefits I'm sure some of you would agree that we've had with the advent of Mr. Rudd as Prime Minister of our country; the fact that Mr. Rudd and his wife are active practicing Christians has taken the heat right off people like me. And rather than having the press, particularly the press in Melbourne making all sorts of noises about what I might or might not do with this office and how awkward it is when people like me, Christians, find themselves in public office, and concerns about the separation of church and state, goodness me...rather than that now of course we have on a Sunday evening at least in Melbourne, the perfectly normal scene of Prime Minister and Mrs. Rudd emerging from Church on a Sunday morning and being interviewed by press on some matter or choosing not to speak as the case may be. Totally normal. Well thank goodness for that would be my view. You might also be aware of course that Glen Stevens, the governor of the Reserve Bank is a confessing Baptist and a strong Christian. So there are a number of us in these positions, and I want to talk to you a little bit about that, the stresses and strains of that; and also for those of us here this evening who are Christians to crave your prayers and support for others like us who are in public office because its not always an easy walk.

I was appointed to the position of Chairman of the Australian Fair Pay Commission in October of 2005. And it was quite a remarkable experience for me as you've heard Rod say I'm an academic and as you've read in the notes there I've been an academic most of my career. I worked for a brief time actually at the Reserve Bank - we lived in Sydney for three years. It was a great pleasure living here at that time but I haven't been involved outside academic life for quite a lengthy period of time so for me it was an opportunity to serve in a public office and to apply my skill as an economist in an area that I think of course is very important for our community.

But it raised some eyebrows to say the least. There were a number of headlines that I wasn't particularly proud of; in the *Sunday Age* in Melbourne screaming in large type was "'God' to set minimum wage." Thank you very much! In at least one of the mainstream newspapers was, "Anglican appointed head of Fair Pay Commission." Now, you know, I think the double standard of our dear friends in the media was on display there. Can you contemplate the possibility of a headline that said "Atheist appointed head of Fair Pay Commission." Or worse, and of course Mr Samuels is a gentleman of Jewish faith, "Jew appointed head of ACCC." Can you imagine how offensive that would be? And how most Australians would find that grossly uncalled for and offensive. "Muslim appointed head," but "Anglican appointed head," that's fine. That's fine.

Well anyway be that as it may you put your head up in public life and in our country we have a robust democracy and I give thanks for that. You put your head up and those sorts of things happen.

Along with much nicer things. When I gave an address early in my tenure, at Albany in WA, there was a meeting not unlike this actually, people who'd come out to hear from me about minimum wages and what the Commission was going to do. It was one of our regular community consultations. And I'd just started speaking and a gentleman got up, stood up at the back of the room, and said "Excuse me, can I ask you a question?" And I said, "Well yes sir, of course". And he said "Look I've come down here tonight to find out about this Commission and to find out about you because I don't know anything about you - who are you anyway?" And I said, 'That's fair enough'. So I answered the question, tried to explain who I was. He said, "Fair enough. I'll be interested to hear what you have to say." So down he sat. We went through the presentation, had some discussion, and up his hand came again. And I said, "Yes sir", and he said to me, "I've heard what you have to say. It's very different from what other people tell me. Now I don't know what to think". And he stood up, and he walked off into the evening, and I smiled. And I thought to myself, "Thank God for our democracy. That that man can now go outside into the evening, totally unconcerned that there would be lurking around 'goons' who might physically beat him up, because he dared to address a public official in such a way. Or worse still, that at 2:30 that morning, a truck would arrive, and that he, his family would never see him again." I say to my two sons, of whom of course I'm enormously proud, "Never let that happen in our country, because there are plenty of places in the world where that does happen on a regular basis."

So it's been for me an enormous privilege, and a great challenge, to be able to address our countrymen about what is as you would appreciate in many quarters quite a controversial issue; exactly where should the minimum wage be set and what sorts of criteria should be taken into account, and let me come back to that a little more in a moment.

It wasn't only *The Age* and other newspaper journalists, who were pretty angry about the fact that the former government would appoint a confessing Christian to this role, let alone an academic, and change various arrangements about the way in which minimum wages had been set, and may I remind you that we have in this country a proud tradition of setting minimum wages - we have set minimum wages for 100 years. At the federal level minimum wages were set under the colonial administrations. In fact the state of Victoria, the former colony of Port Phillip, was setting minimum wages in the late 19th Century.

So this is something that we in Australia have been doing for a very long time. If you think "Well what's so interesting about that, what's so unique about that?" can I point out that the British have been setting minimum wages for only eight years. So it's something that here in Australia we have a long tradition associated with. Those of you who know something of the history of this recognize the name of Justice Henry Bournes Higgins, will remember the

name of the Harvester Judgment, will remember that that judgment was passed in 1907, 3 years after the creation of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration in 1904 by the very first Australian Labor Party Government in our country led by a man called John Chris Watson in 1904. Not in power for very long but one of the things the Watson Government did was to create this institution which has come down to us to this day in the form of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission; a very strong part of ALP culture and policy; a little more of that later on if you wish in question time. It is therefore unsurprising that our newly elected ALP Government would take that and have it affirmed by the Australian electorate to return these powers from the Australian Fair Pay Commission to a new body – Fair Work Australia, so it can incorporate the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. In other words, unsurprisingly the ALP Government would seek to move forward and not just go back to what was there before, clearly building on the Australian Industrial Relations Commission which has a long and distinguished history within the ALP and obviously within our own country.

Well as I say it wasn't just journalists who were concerned about my appointment, interestingly, it was also Christians. There were quite significant concerns expressed by Churches around Australia about the Institution and something about my being appointed to the Institution which I found a little strange. One leader of one Church, nationally, claimed that it was inconsistent, that it was in fact a contradiction for a Christian to hold the office of Chairman of the Australian Fair Pay Commission. Which I find quite distressing; because either I was being accused of being a fraud, or there was something about this job I didn't understand and I'd been duped. Others weren't quite so strident but nevertheless expressed concern. Including the Archbishop, the Anglican Archbishop here in Sydney, Archbishop Peter, and his counterparts in Melbourne and elsewhere. So Christians had concerns.

As I look back on this I think that one of the concerns Christians had apart from the wider set of laws associated with work choices legislation which clearly wrangled with many parts of the Australian Community not just the churches and the Fair Pay Commission was born within that context. Arguably not necessarily related to many of the other things that work choices stood for but nevertheless the legislation that established and still does, undergird the Australian Fair Pay Commission resides within the work choices legislation - that may have been part of the problem.

But I think that Christians were concerned that these decisions about minimum wages would be made in a moral vacuum. That they would be made on the basis of purely technical considerations or possibly even ideological considerations. Why? Well of course the legislation had removed for the first time in 100 years the word 'fairness'. Oddly enough that word appeared in the title of the institution but not of the legislation itself and when Justice Higgins first promulgated the Harvester Judgment of course he spoke of the need for fair and equitable treatment in setting this wage, and that principle, the word anyway, had been taken out of the legislation. There was concern, I think, that the decisions would be made on a purely technical, narrow, reductionist grounds by a technical economist. Again I should point out that I'm one of five

on the Commission, there are 2 economists, myself and another, the other 3 positions are occupied by a former trade unionist - a man who used to run the Australian Services Union; Patrick McClure who used to run Mission Australia, you might know, a fellow Sydney-sider of yours; and a gentleman who runs a quite successful small business called Mini Movers out of Brisbane with roots elsewhere in the country, Mike O'Hagan. There are 5 people but nevertheless there was a concern that this decision process that had always had that fairness edge to it would become a purely technical decision. That would be my interpretation.

Even my fellow economists, my fellow professionals, had expressed reservations about my appointment to this role, not because of my economics I hope, but because of my professed faith. One of my dear colleagues described me on radio, at least was quoted as having described me as "a straight laced, conservative, right wing religious zealot". You've got to know who your friends are in this business isn't that right? Anyway, I had no idea, I do not want to know. It's a free country, he or she are more than welcome to express their view. I think what that person was concerned about was that I as a Christian economist would violate what we economists call the 'fact value distinction'. And those philosophers in the audience, or frankly many people who would give this 5 minutes' thought would question the existence of a fact value distinction, but my profession doesn't. It says it exists; and what that basically means is, folks, that religious convictions and moral qualms are to be parked at the door. That the decisions that we make are decisions that are made in a scientific fashion based upon the facts and we're not having values and religious views muddled up in all of this thank you very much. We might have started out as a branch of moral philosophy but we gave all that a way in the late 19th Century if not then in the early 20th Century and here's a guy standing up claiming that he's a Christian economist, but goodness me, he's about to muddle all that stuff in to what should really be a decision based on the data alone.

So you can see that I was facing attack from both sides. As a Christian economist I'm quite used to that in a way; I do get tackled by Christian brothers and sisters who want to say well it's a contradiction in terms to be a Christian economist; and the economists who put the position that I've just indicated to you.

I answer both of them in this way, and you can test me to see if you think these answers carry any weight. To my brothers and sisters in Christ I say there is no mercy or justice in bad economics. There is no justice or mercy in bad medicine. No mercy or justice in bad engineering. No mercy or justice in bad carpentry. So if we're to love justice or mercy and walk humbly with our God, then my answer to my brothers and sisters in Christ is that it's just as important for us to do that in the realm of economics, as it is in any other sphere.

Now it might be a little hard to get our heads around the idea of economics as a caring profession; easy enough to think about doctors and nurses and teachers and others...economists??

Well, I'd ask you to just think for a moment, we've been hearing about what's happening elsewhere in the world. Think for a moment what's happening in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe, folks is a wealthy country, it is not short of resources. Zimbabwe is being destroyed for reasons you understand as well as I do, it is being destroyed by the abuse of human institutions, that's what's destroying it. And, God help the people of Zimbabwe, literally as we pray for them in this travail, I was talking to Martin earlier on who knows the Church in Zimbabwe very well. I was pleased although of course distressed to hear that the Church in Zimbabwe is well, but struggling for resources of course as it deals with the potential for mass starvation.

Economics works in reverse as well as does in forward. Sometimes it works faster and more devastatingly in reverse than it does in forward as to some extent we're experiencing through the sub-prime crisis but that of course is on a different dimension from what's happening in Zimbabwe. So I say to Christian brothers and sisters there is no mercy or justice in that. There is no mercy or justice in the abuse of economic policy. And getting economic policy right is an attempt for us quite possibly wrong headed, but never the less an attempt on the part of Christian economists to meet out those requirements of the scriptures.

To my fellow economists I say, there is more to building the just society than simply raising economic prosperity. In this country there are many, many people who would react viscerally to the notion of economic rationalism that would call up in your minds something which you think is a distortion something not to be, not to be praised or emulated. As an economist what I think people mean when they say, 'economic rationalism', with almost contempt in their voices; I think what they're saying is just that "there is more to the just society than merely economic prosperity." Now it is important for me to remind my fellow economists of that because there is nothing in the body of formal economic learning which says that economics as such can tell you about the just society. About aspects of what makes for the just society beyond economic prosperity.

Economics is a very narrow and utilitarian discipline. One of the famous practitioners of my craft J.M. Keynes compared economics with dentistry. He was writing in the 1930s and looked forward to the day when dental caries would have been healed, rather like smallpox, that dentists in fact would have nothing to do, and that profession would, pardon me - dentists in the audience, would either have to go on and find something to do like cosmetic dentistry, or the basic work of that profession might disappear. Now that might be naïve on his part but he rapidly went on to say that that was what he had in mind for economics, that we could solve these problems and that in fact the system could be put on to automatic pilot.

So my fellow Christians I say there's nothing good about bad economics and to my fellow economists I say there's nothing exclusive or all encompassing about economic prosperity. There's more to the good society than that. We need values in order to be able to make economic prescriptions which will

deliver us closer to the good society and not just solve narrow technical problems.

One of the things I had the great privilege to do soon after taking office was to hear a presentation by Kim Beasley who was still then leader of the Opposition. It was an occasion not unlike this actually where people were talking about their faith and Kim was sharing his own faith at that time and the faith of his family. And made an interesting point actually, amongst a number, he said that it was not something that he and his political office up until that time had ever said much about, that he was a strong Catholic Christian, had a strong Catholic upbringing and of course was still a strong practicing Catholic, as I assume he is to this day. But he said that it had become a matter which he had never discussed, essentially because of the experience his father had during the DLP split of the 1950s. And, Kim said he saw Kim Beasley Snr, torn by this. He saw friends of the Beasley family cease to be friends because of this; and he said publicly, and I hope he doesn't mind my quoting him; he said publicly on that occasion, "Friends, I vowed and declared at that time that if ever I took public office like my father", which of course he did, "I would never place people in a position, never place my fellow Australians in a position where they had to choose between their politics and their faith." And so he never discussed it, but he said "times have changed and people now want to know what's driving you, where your value system comes from" and he was very quick to say "and I'm proud to be able, well not proud, not quite the right word, very happy to say, that I am a confessing Catholic Christian and that's where my value set comes from." And then he went on to say something that I thought was very important. He said, "You know folks, it's impossible to go into public life, to take on public office, and leave your values outside the door. It's impossible." And I thought, 'Yes, that's the key'.

People might not like the fact that my values are Christian values. But to imply that any one of the other four members of my Commission or any five Australians who are appointed to this role would go into that office, would sit around that Commission table making a decision about minimum wages affecting some of the most vulnerable members of our community without infusing that decision with their own values whatever they are is just naïve. Just naïve.

So when I heard Kim say that I thought "That's it; that's it." Whether folk like my Christian values or whether they don't, what I'm going to say is the following - I have tried to make them clear. I have at least said, "well folks, those are my values." And I welcome you to hold me accountable to those values. I'm not going to say that I'm free of sin, that I'm not going to make a mistake, but that's the lone star that I'm trying to follow, and if you see me veering off; you speak up, because I put that down on the table. They're explicit, and I think clear. You can hear these values expounded, frankly, any Sunday, and the doors are not closed. They're written down in a book, and you can buy a copy of the book. This is not exactly secret and I would say that in public life, echoing here Kim Beasley; it is not possible to exercise authority without bringing your own values to the table.

As a Christian I think it is incumbent upon me to make it clear to our brothers and sisters, our countrymen of whatever faith or none, that those are the values that I bring. People are welcome to agree with that, to disagree, to like it or not, to criticise, that's part of what democracy stands for. But I see myself saying, "Those are the values – take them or leave them." But what I want you to understand is that when I sit around that table and make a decision about minimum wages, those are the values I am trying to bring to this decision in addition to my technical knowledge.

So to my economist friends; "No" it isn't just a technical decision. It's a decision which is inevitably infused by values.

To Christian brothers and sisters: Don't worry that I at least am sitting there switching off my value framework trying to make a decision based purely and simply on technical grounds. "No folks," it is a moral decision as well as a technical decision. I'm not saying I'll necessarily get it right; I'm not saying you'll agree. But what I am saying is that it is an infusion of technical and moral considerations and I try my hardest under God to provide that balance.

Interestingly on another occasion I was speaking about this subject, and the now treasurer, treasurer Swan was there. And Wayne asked me a question, (he wasn't treasurer of the day at that time but opposition spokesperson) he said. "I'd like to ask you this question, is setting minimum wages an economic problem or a moral problem?" Very astute question. Excellent question from Wayne Swan – now treasurer Wayne Swan. And I said, "As far as the legislation is concerned, whether you like it or whether you don't, the legislation crafts this problem as an economic problem. And the criteria which are laid down there now that the word fairness has been removed; the criteria that are laid down there are economic criteria. It's about insuring that the minimum wage does not interrupt or interfere with people's capacity to find and retain work. That setting the minimum wage doesn't upset inflation, or competitiveness in the labour market. That setting the minimum wage forms part of the safety net for low paid Australians. It plugs in to the tax and social security system. And that the minimum wage for juniors, trainees and workers with a disability doesn't effect or undermine their capacity to find work. Now all of those I think are perfectly reasonable criteria, but they're all economic criteria. So Wayne, as far as the legislation is concerned, it directs the Commission's attention to economic criteria. But when you put five Australians around a table and you say; 'now you, five people you make a decision based on this,' then that decision will be made by people who inevitably bring values to the table as I've described. And at that level it's a moral problem. The two running together."

It's obvious it's a good deal easier these days particularly with a Christian church going Prime Minister and others in high office who are now, thankfully, able to declare their Christian faith without immediate criticism or ridicule from the press. This isn't to say the press has been converted necessarily to the Christian cause, but I think it's begun now to accept that a Christian voice in the public sphere is as legitimate as an atheist voice, or an Islamic voice, or a voice of no faith; that in a pluralist society Christians should be able to have their point of view put across as well and that they should respect individual

Christians as they would I'm sure respect atheists, those of the Islamic faith, those of no faith; that if they take on public office they have enough gumption to be able to keep those things separate where they need to be separate and to blend them in the way that I've described where it's appropriate to blend them.

Having said all that it would be very easy for Christians to avoid public office. Very easy; because there are plenty of people still who are ready to criticise any involvement at all and to raise the spectre of church-state separation which I must say in this context anyway is a real 'furfy'. The thing itself of course is very important - the idea of somebody exercising in office who happens to be a Christian could tread across that line without any legislative authority seems to me far fetched – you may not agree with that, but I found that one stretching, stretching the imagination.

It would nevertheless very easy for Christians to stand clear of taking public office and there are strong traditions as some of you would be well aware within the Christian faith that actually say that we should do that. That the world is fallen, is literally going to hell and that Christians should therefore stand back. Yes, the victory has been won, the devil has been defeated on the cross, the world will disappear and be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth. Well praise God that's the faith I hold as well, but I don't interpret that to mean therefore in the meantime like the Thessalonians I should just sit here and wait for the perousia. In the meantime there are people who are in need of Christian succour and support.

So I want to conclude tonight, ladies and gentlemen, by making a call to all Christians; and let me extend that, to all Australians who have a value conviction. I want to be careful not to imply that the only people who have the values I'm about to describe are necessarily Christians, I'm not saying that. But I am saying that Christians have a clear value set and a commitment to other persons-centered work, to other persons-centered ethic. To the grand traditions of public benefit and public service. Not uniquely, but if people have those ethics who are not Christians, but if you are, and in an audience like this tonight I know exactly to whom I speak; that we have an emphasis of servanthood, because that's the example that the Lord Jesus himself gave us, that we have an emphasis on other persons-centered ethics.

Then if you have that, I want to make a call for such people to be actively involved in our public life. And can I say again, what an encouragement it is to come out this evening and see a group of Australians gathered as you are here tonight, in community, to talk about an issue that concerns us all. But you've set aside for the moment your legitimate personal concerns, individual interests, for the sake of being together. To our generation this sounds commonplace, but I fear that it is becoming rarer and rarer. I fear that the individualist ethic which some people may blame my profession for stirring up - and you might have a point. I fear that the individualist ethic undermines this commitment to community and to sharing even if it is just coming out and keeping somebody company this evening. If that's all you've done, can I

congratulate you for that. That you've set aside your own personal interests to be a part of that.

Our communal life, our public life, is built on this type of civil society, this sort of civil community, and it might seem commonplace to have to say it, but I think we have to say it loudly and warmly. And one of the things that Christians can contribute, along with those with similar views who don't share the faith, is to say, "Well yes, this is totally consistent with the values that we have. It's not that we're against the private sector or private interests, on the contrary, it is about at some level individual salvation, but it's also about fellowship and the life of us together."

So I think that Christians ought not to take the easy road here which is all too tempting to do. And in whatever sphere, whatever area the Lord presents to you if you have an opportunity to serve in a public office, no matter how grand, lofty or humble in your view it might be; can I encourage you to do that. And to do that without fear or favour. Because our community, our country needs this, and I fear; and a little anecdote and I don't mean this to be against the person concerned and of course the person whose name I won't divulge, or even against your fair selves but I have to say that I did spend a very interesting afternoon a year or so back on Sydney Harbour, with a professional colleague of mine who is retired, worked for a very wealthy bank which shall remain nameless and we were on the harbour in his yacht. And I was enjoying Sydney Harbour as only Sydney Harbour can be enjoyed, and I was enjoying various other things like oysters and this and that. And of course my friend started to get stuck into the NSW Government. I'm on your territory so I won't go into that. But suffice to say, even elsewhere in the country we recognize some things about the NSW Government and its behavior that maybe a little strange. And this gentleman was saying, "You know this place is going to the dogs. I'll show you how bad it is right, they even returned the government, right, the opposition was in such a mess" You've been part of these conversations I'm sure.

And the irony struck me, I thought the problem is sitting across the table from me, pardon me. This man is a very intelligent, experienced, talented executive. He's what - 56? Here he is sitting on his yacht in the middle of the harbour, thumping the table about how dreadful government and public life has become in NSW and then went on to say, "Who'd do a job like that?" And, and, but...you can see the irony.

In the end I said. "I'm sorry, but I've got to say this, unless people like you offer your self, selves, to those 'rotten jobs' and get paid a pittance and abused at the RSL, yes? Unless you offer yourselves to those jobs, do not stand here and tell me about this, go tell your own fellow New South Welshmen how rotten the system is if noone will come forward."

Please I'm not criticizing NSW we have the same issues in Victoria obviously and around the country, but my point is this, that it's too easy for all of us to withdraw and to be on our yachts and to be nicely pursuing whatever it is we've earned which we deserve, I'm not saying we don't deserve that, but what I am saying is the collective quality of our public life will deteriorate if folk

aren't prepared to make those contributions. So can I call on us all to this type of service.

One final point in that same vein, there's been a rash of books written about what people call "affluenza". Essentially it's a result of what I would say is selfish materialism. A bit of an offence in a way that countries like ours have become so wealthy, so well off, that they actually get sick. Umm. Modern psychiatry has recognized this condition that has a clinical basis and it's also prescribed an antidote. Surprise, surprise the antidote is service.

Get out there and do something for somebody else for a change. Again please don't hear me trivializing the seriousness of mental illness, I'm referring to a much more general phenomenon of ennui, just boredom. Just with all of this stuff what do I do now? That kind of thing.

I think as Christians we can help our communities more generally to resolve these sorts of issues by encouraging once again an ethic of service. By helping people, particularly the younger generation to rediscover the type of community that you've established here in this group. And it is no surprise, no coincidence that there are not really young people in this group here this evening. This is not the way many young people choose to operate. Not a different world, I understand that, but some things about fellowship, and human interaction, and service, those are lessons we can teach and pass on to the next generation and I'm not entirely certain we are doing that.

Folks, people are hungry for selfless moral leadership. And the church stands ready to offer it. Surely, that's a gift that we can offer to the community at large, and if we're not doing it - shame on us as Christians.

Let me conclude. As I've said, it's been an enormous challenge and a privilege for me to hold this particular office, and I won't do so for much longer. The new government has indicated that it wants the Commission to continue to set minimum wages until the 1st of January 2010, when that task will be assumed by Fair Work Australia. Which is fine, I spoke to the deputy Prime Minister before Christmas to ask her what the government's intentions were and she said exactly that, just keep doing what you're doing thank you very much, for the next 18 months, two more decisions, and I said "that's fine minister, I said may I ask whether the government intends to change the rules under which the Commission operates, in other words, 'will you go back and change the legislation now?'"

And the deputy Prime Minister said to me, "No, we don't intend to do that." Now the legislation has been passed through the parliament you should be aware with the agreement of the now opposition through the senate, and the bill has become law. And the same criteria which governed the setting of minimum wages under the old act are still there. So when people say to me now, 1. "Why are you still here?" and 2. "Why are you still setting minimum wages according to those old rules?" I say, "Well that's a matter madam, or sir, that you need to take up with the minister, because the government has now endorsed that approach."

But my colleagues on the Commission and I, with two more decisions to make, one coming up in the middle of this year, which we will make following the next budget in May, announced in July, and one more next year. The task that remains to us and that my colleagues are fully signed on to as we work our way down to the end of the life of this particular institution, firstly to ensure that we finish this task as we started it, in full conviction of serving the parliament of this country, and what it wrote down in the law, so help us God, or, so help me God. And, secondly, to leave as a legacy of this period an emphasis on research which is the one thing written down in the act that was new given that the system that we now use is a non-judicial system, it is an inquisitorial system; it is possible for the commission to inform itself by making its own enquiries which was never possible under a judicial system. Obviously the bench cannot get involved in bringing evidence to itself. The evidence that comes forward to the bench is brought forward by the parties at dispute. That's how the judicial system works. The new system, or the system which we presently have at the federal level is an inquisitorial system and that is to say the 5 commissioners can ask of anybody on any subject, related to Fair Pay, pardon me - minimum wages, and we do.

We've established a research foundation as part of that. I'm an academic, and you'll be none surprised to hear that's what I've been keen to do. My hope is that that the foundation will be found to be of sufficient value that when this institution ceases to exist and these responsibilities are passed forward to Fair Work Australia that that will be considered sufficient value going forward that it will be retained. I emphasize folks that is not a matter for me; it is a matter ultimately for the government and in fact for the successor organization to decide. But if you are asking me directly, "What are you going to do, as you lead up to the end of a life of this institution?" Here is my answer; "We will set two more decisions without fear or favour and we will hope to bequeath to our successor in law, a foundation of research, and evidence, and public submissions, and consultations which would recommend itself to a successor organization."

I have to tell you that one of the most enriching aspects of this job is going around to community groups like that one in Albany, Western Australia, talking to our fellow citizens hearing from them about their concerns for minimum wages. You can imagine in many cases the stories that I hear, tragic stories. I met recently with 8 unemployed people in Western Australia. One of my colleague wags said, 'oh, all 8'?. Western Australia is a very tight economy, unemployment is very low. But to talk to people in those circumstances, one young man couldn't read or write, that's why he hasn't got a job. Not even a mining company will take on somebody who can't read or write because they can't read the instructions on the road side as you can imagine. This young man born an indigenous person, there will be plenty in that category tragically who are. There are still substantial disadvantages in our community; this job exposes me to that, it's not normally what I would see, as an academic in a literal ivory tower, but for me it's been an enormous privilege to be involved in that. And I for one, not just thinking to bring my Christian values to that but this is a gift from God in my view, I have sought

myself to be challenged by that and to grow from the experience and I thank God for the opportunity.

Thank you for listening.