

Response to Australian Student Christian Movement (WA)

What is your vision for how government can best benefit the poor?

The Coalition sees greater prosperity and economic growth as fundamentally linked to improved social outcomes for the poor. For instance, the capacity of individual Australians to find meaningful employment creates opportunities for self reliance, self esteem and family cohesion. Disciplined economic management by government permits investments in education, health and social services that would otherwise be impossible. In government, the Coalition will continue to astutely manage the economy and invest the resultant financial returns in areas of community need.

How do you intend to address global poverty? Will you be increasing Australia's aid budget to at least 0.7% of GDP?

The Coalition has delivered seven consecutive real increases in Official Development Assistance (ODA), lifting our commitment to economic development and poverty alleviation by 62 per cent in real terms. In 1996/97 Australia's Aid budget was \$1.4 billion – this year it is \$3.15 billion. The Coalition will boost aid to \$4.3 billion annually by 2010-11.

Australian aid is helping the world achieve the MDGs, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Our investment in a number of areas including a multi-year \$600m HIV/AIDS commitment, education, health, the environment and climate change closely align with MDG sectors.

The Coalition supports the UN goal of 0.7 per cent ODA/GNI ratio as an international aspiration but does not agree with time-bound targets to reach this goal.

While aid is important, poverty cannot be reduced without economic activity and growth within affected countries. Relieving debt and removing trade barriers are also keys to greater prosperity and well-being in developing countries.

How do you propose to support humanitarian entrants to Australia, including those who arrive informally to seek asylum?

Under the Coalition, Australia now accepts approximately 13,000 refugees each year for permanent settlement under its humanitarian programs. On a per capita basis, this is the highest humanitarian intake by any country in the world.

In deciding the composition of our refugee and humanitarian policy, the Government considers who is in the greatest need of our assistance. Various groups are consulted, including representatives of non – government refugee organisations and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Recognising our responsibility for newly arrived refugees does not simply end once they arrive in Australia, considerable effort and expense is directed towards providing English language assistance, income support, vocational training, support to develop life skills, family relationship counselling, health services and education about legal responsibilities. Each program is aimed towards assisting refugees move towards happy, productive lives.

Following an examination of settlement services, the Coalition allocated an additional \$210 million in this year's budget to enhance these programs. This is in addition to the \$250 million a year the Coalition Government normally spends on settlement related services.

This extra money is especially needed to enable young migrants to speak adequate English, to assist victims of torture and trauma and to simply teach people the basic essentials needed to manage from week to week.

In respect to illegal entry, the Coalition is committed to the elimination of people smuggling, because it both endangers the lives of asylum seekers and discriminates against the thousands of refugees who often spend years in camps following a lawful process to enter Australia. People smuggling is a sophisticated, multinational business which cares nothing for those it profits from. To that end, we will maintain our current policy setting which means that people who try to enter Australia illegally will not be permitted to enter Australia.

Implementation of this policy is not at the expense of asylum seekers' welfare. All potential immigrants who seek to enter Australian illegally receive medical examinations and medical treatment where appropriate.

Living conditions are made as comfortable as possible and considerable efforts are made to provide a 'normalised' environment. Rooms are air-conditioned; food reflects cultural sensitivities; residents have access to sporting and exercise facilities, television and libraries; are supplied with telephone cards and may attend English language classes. At all time, religious freedom is respected.

How do you intend to address the crisis in accommodation for homeless and low-income Australians?

The Coalition Government takes the issue of homelessness extremely seriously and spent approximately \$231.4 million in the 2006-07 financial year on programmes for homeless persons.

People at risk of homelessness often face a collection of challenges including mental health issues, substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment and lack of education.

For these reasons, the Coalition focuses on early intervention programs that seek to address people's personal issues before they end up on the streets. Programs that help address homelessness include:

- **National Homelessness Strategy** - The Coalition Government provided \$10 million over four years in the 2005-06 Budget to fund the National Homelessness Strategy (NHS). The NHS provides leadership in developing innovative approaches for the prevention and reduction of homelessness and breaks new ground in integrated service delivery to people who are vulnerable to homelessness.
- **Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)** - The Coalition Government has allocated \$932 million for SAAP from 2005 to 2010 to assist people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence by providing transitional supported accommodation and a range of related support services. \$40 million has also been allocated to an Innovation and Investment Fund. The focus of the Fund is on identifying ways of reducing the high rates of return to SAAP services by improving pre-crisis intervention, post-crisis transition and linkages with other services, including mental health and employment support services.
- **Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program** - HOME is designed to prevent family homelessness by giving tailored assistance to individual families who face difficulty in maintaining tenancies or home ownership due to personal or financial circumstances. HOME's early intervention approach prevents families from using crisis accommodation services. This program has been delivering impressive results as a majority of the families that participate have been prevented from becoming homeless.

Youth homelessness is of particular concern to the Coalition which is why one of the first tasks Prime Minister Howard undertook when elected to office in 1996 was to establish the Prime Minister's Youth Homelessness Taskforce.

The Coalition Government funds a number of programs that seek to assist young people that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless including:

- **Reconnect** - helping at-risk young people reconnect with their families, education, training, employment and community;
- **YouthLinx** - supporting young people and their families build self reliance, strengthen their family relationships and encourage community involvement;
- **Transition to Independent Living Allowance** - provides one-off financial support to the value of \$1,000, for young people who are about to, or have exited formal state based care and/or informal care such as juvenile justice; out-of-home care and Indigenous kinship care arrangements; and
- **Job Placement, Employment and Training Program**- assisting the disadvantaged, including homeless young people move towards securing employment and sustainable futures.

What is your national anti-poverty strategy?

The Coalition's anti-poverty strategy incorporates elements from across government, including many of the areas detailed in this survey – health, education, homelessness, job creation etc. As stated, a central plank of any anti-poverty strategy must be ensuring economic prosperity which creates job opportunities for individual Australians and provides the means by which government can invest in areas of social need. Only the Coalition has the experience and discipline to effectively maintain and grow Australia's vibrant economy.

How will you ensure low-income earners are supported through the tax and welfare system? Will you be introducing a less punitive welfare system?

The Coalition has deliberately targeted low to medium income earners for additional assistance through ongoing welfare and taxation reform. ABS figures released in June 2007 show that, as a result of Coalition policies, only the top 40% of households pay net tax, after cash and in-kind benefits are taken into account.

Lowest income households received 44.5 per cent of social benefits in cash whereas the top 20 per cent of income earners received only 1.7 per cent of social assistance benefits. Households in the lowest income groups paid 1.3 per cent of total taxes on income while households in the highest income groups paid 58.2 per cent.

The net effect of benefits and taxes is to increase the average income of households in the lower income groups compared to higher income groups.

In respect to Australia's welfare position compared with other nations, a recent leading report noted 'Australia directs relatively more of its spending to the poor than any other OECD country – and by a very wide margin'.

If re-elected, the Coalition will continue to reform the taxation system, providing even further incentives for low income workers to join in the workforce. These personal income tax cuts will be made from 1 July 2008 and will build on the significant reductions in personal income tax for low and average income earners contained within the last five budgets.

This tax plan is intended to build towards an ambitious new goal for Australia's personal income tax system. The goal is that over five years by 2012-13 the personal income tax system will have an enhanced low income tax offset (LITO) that will mean that low income earners will have an effective tax free threshold of at least \$20,000.

How does your industrial relations policy protect the powerless, support family life and ensure adequate income for all?

Australia now has a workplace relations system that will continue to deliver more jobs and higher wages for working families into the future. Our clear plan is to bed down the important economic reforms of the past three years and concentrate on moving towards the Coalition's long-held goal of full employment. In fact, in the past 18 months, 430,700 new jobs have been created – 77% of them full time.

Wages have grown by 21.5% over and above inflation (cost of living increases) in the past 11 years and by 2.9 percent since the new workplace relations system began. In contrast, when Labor was last in Government, real wages decreased and nearly one million people became unemployed.

The essence of the Coalition's reform of workplace relations is to provide flexibility to both employers and workers – including the ability of employees to negotiate a better balance between work and family. The Coalition Government's Workplace Relations Act formally protects a range of entitlements relating to family time and responsibilities including hours of work, annual, personal and parental leave, and job protection.

Specifically, the Coalition Government's Workplace Relations Act protects family time and responsibilities in a number of ways:

- The Australian Fair Pay and Conditions Standard guarantees that the maximum ordinary hours of work are 38 per week and that any hours a worker is requested to perform in addition to these must be reasonable having regard to factors such as his/her family responsibilities;
- It is unlawful to terminate a worker's employment because of his/her family responsibilities or on the ground of religion.
- 4 weeks' paid annual leave is now a guaranteed legal right.
- 10 days paid personal/carers' leave is now a guaranteed right and workers can utilise this leave to care for a family member who is ill;
- Workers also have the capacity to access unpaid carer's leave on an ongoing basis;
- Up to 52 weeks' unpaid parental leave is now a guaranteed legal right.
- It is against the law for an employer to dismiss or otherwise alter a worker's employment status because he/she has refused to work on a public holiday on the basis of family responsibilities or other personal circumstances.
- If an employer seeks to alter an Award entitlement to penalty rates and/or overtime, the Fairness Test administered by the Workplace Authority requires that the worker must be fairly compensated in return.

The Coalition's system has strong protections to ensure Australians get a fair go at work. A Workplace Infoline provides detailed advice and a Workplace Ombudsman is in place to protect all employees.

Australia's system strikes the right balance between strong protections for workers and flexibility. It is more regulated and provides more protections than similar countries such as the UK and New Zealand.

At the same time our system is giving people the option of having more flexible working arrangements which suit the modern workplace and help Australians balance work and family life.

A modern and flexible workplace system, combined with disciplined economic management will allow the Coalition to implement important economic policies such as taxation reform with confidence.

What policies do you have to support the development of Indigenous Australians, including closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia's health and well-being?

The Coalition Government has embarked on a major emergency intervention to tackle issues such as law and order and child abuse within Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Underpinning this action was the emphatic belief that children within indigenous communities are entitled to the same opportunity for happy productive lives and protection from violence as every other Australian child.

The Coalition Government has already announced \$587 million to support the first year of the intervention as well as a commitment for ongoing support.

In addition, over the coming four years, the Coalition will provide a further \$740 million funding in following essential areas –

- \$514 million to repair and build housing in remote NT communities.
- \$100 million for more doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and specialist services.
- \$18.5 million for 66 additional Australian Federal Police involved in resolving law and order issues within NT indigenous communities.
- \$78.2 million to move indigenous Australians from CDEP to real jobs in fields such as the arts, broadcasting, community care, education, sport and recreation, night patrols, environmental and pastoral management, childcare and municipal services.
- Up to \$30 million to match the NT Government on a dollar for dollar basis to create further employment opportunities.

The Coalition Government has also announced changes to the Permit system within the NT resulting in permits not being required for public town areas, infrastructure and roads but still maintaining permits for sacred sites and private residences. These changes affect only 1% of Aboriginal land. These reforms will help connect those townships with

the real economy and the prospect of a better future as well as providing for more public scrutiny and openness - like other Australian towns. It is notable that a number of relatively functional communities, like Daly River which has strong Christian connections, do not have the permit system and that is the way they prefer it to be.

Importantly, the Coalition wants to work with traditional owners to enable them to realise economic benefit from their land, previously frustrated by restrictive provisions in legislation but without affecting their underlying freehold tenure over land.

As well as the NT emergency intervention, the Coalition has provided \$130 million following its 2006 Summit on violence and abuse in Indigenous communities for policing, rehabilitation and other measures to support the states and territories in this work.

Overall, the Coalition Government has provided a record \$3.5 billion in 2007-08 for indigenous programs nationally over and above specific funding for the NT intervention.

Finally, the Coalition is committed to implementing welfare reform, starting in NT aboriginal communities because of the concentration of dysfunction, to ensure that welfare paid for the benefit of children is actually used for children and not wasted through the scourges of substance abuse and gambling.

What is your party's policy response to student poverty and high levels of debt?

A recent Universities Australia Student Finances report found that full-time students are working just 18 minutes more per week than they were in 2000 yet are earning 82% more. The product of a strong economy is that young people can get a job while also pursuing tertiary education.

Under Labor, Australia had a million Australians out of work and 100,000 eligible students turned away from university. Next year, any eligible student who wants to go to university on a taxpayer supported place should be able to do so.

The Coalition recognises that some students are doing it tough and that is why we invested an additional \$222 million in support for students in this year's Budget. The Coalition provides around \$2 billion to full-time students in receipt of Austudy, Abstudy or youth allowance.

We will continue to look at further ways to assist young Australians into education and work. If we do not keep Australia's economy strong, new initiatives will be impossible.

How will you ensure universal access to high quality education and health care?

Further Education

The Coalition Government has provided a 24 fold increase in funding of technical and vocational training in the last 10 years to a total of \$24 billion, from \$1 billion in 1996.

Part of this funding has been for the establishment of Australian Technical Colleges, which were announced at the 2004 election. There has been a revival in public interest in technical and vocational education. These colleges, which allow year 11 and 12 students to commence a schools-based apprenticeship while completing their Year 12 certificate, offer an innovative pathway to a trade career. The Coalition Government is investing \$530.9 million to establish 28 of these colleges around the country. By 2009, these colleges will be providing vocational and technical education to between 8,000 and 10,000 students.

In addition to this, more than 400,000 young people are receiving valuable skills and training through the Australian Apprenticeship Programme – an increase of almost 160% since 1996.

Our Universities

For those school students moving into the university system, the future quality of the education they receive has been further assured by the Coalition Government's creation of the Higher Education Endowment Fund (HEEF). As a result of the Coalition's 11 years of strong economic management, we have been able to invest a record \$6 billion to establish the HEEF which will provide ongoing support to our universities for capital works and research facilities.

This is part of the \$7.9 billion additional investment the Coalition has made in higher education this year. It also brings to \$8.8 billion the amount the Australian Government will invest in our universities this financial year, a 31 per cent real increase on the Australian Government's investment in 1995-96.

The Australian Government provides 56 per cent of the university sector's revenue and the overall financial health of the sector is strong:

- University revenue has almost doubled since 1996 to \$15.5 billion in 2006
- The sector's combined operating surplus stands at \$1.3 billion (up 51 per cent on 2005)
- Total sector net assets are \$28.5 billion (up 11 per cent on 2005)
- Cash and investments are \$7.9 billion (up 12.5 per cent on 2005)

There are almost 1 million students at Australian universities, including 61,000 more taxpayer-supported undergraduate places this year than there were in 1995.

The Australian Government is providing an additional 50,000 Commonwealth-supported places between 2004 and 2011 and the Budget decision of the Australian Government to fund over-enrolments up to 5 per cent will potentially create up to a further 21,000 Commonwealth-supported places next year. This is many thousands more than the number of eligible students Universities Australia estimates missed out on a university place this year.

97.5 per cent of all domestic undergraduate students in public universities are in Commonwealth-supported places. 91.4 per cent of all school leavers who applied for a university place received an offer in their home state.

The median starting salary for graduates is \$40,800 and many earn much more. A student does not have to begin repaying their taxpayer-funded loan until they start earning \$39,825 and then never pay more than 8 per cent of their salary per year.

The Coalition provided an additional \$222 million in this year's Budget for additional scholarships and other support for students. Each year, the Australian Government provides around \$2 billion to full-time students in receipt of youth allowance, Austudy and Abstudy payments. The Australian Government's support for students as a proportion of GDP is well above the OECD average (0.37 per cent vs the OECD average of 0.26 per cent).

Australia performs ahead of the pack when it comes to access to tertiary education. 32 per cent of Australians aged 25-64 years have a tertiary qualification compared to the OECD country mean of 26 per cent and 35 per cent of 19 year-olds are in tertiary education, above the OECD average of 29 per cent. Australia is also the top-ranked country in the OECD for the proportion of students entering, and graduating from, university.

The Coalition is driving reform that will produce a higher quality, more diverse and more responsive higher education sector.

Health

The Australian health system is one of the best in the world, offering high quality health care while remaining highly affordable to Australian families.

Unlike many other countries, means are not a barrier to getting necessary health care in Australia.

The Coalition is very proud of its achievements in health. Since 1996, federal spending on health and aged care had more than doubled to \$52 billion a year. Even more importantly, we've improved the quality and sustainability of Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Under the Coalition, health care has approached its federal health responsibilities with a philosophy of continuous improvement. We've training more doctors and nurses, we've taken the national lead on helping people with mental illnesses, and we've worked to relieve pressure on our healthcare resources by doing a lot more on preventive health and helping Australians better manage chronic health conditions.

Our State-run public hospitals undoubtedly are struggling despite the extraordinary efforts of those that work in them. While we aren't responsible for running public hospitals, Coalition policies have helped to relieve the pressure on them by expanding after-hours GP services and getting over 40 per cent of hospital admissions and 56 per cent of surgery into private hospitals.

What is your plan to reduce Australia's negative environmental impacts?

The Coalition Government moved quickly and decisively more than a decade ago to establish a comprehensive climate change strategy, including the establishment of the world's first ever dedicated climate change agency – the Australian Greenhouse Office – in 1998.

Since 1996, the Coalition Government has committed \$3.5 billion to addressing climate change, including \$741 million in the most recent Budget. We are well on track to meeting our 108 per cent emissions target, set under the Kyoto Protocol. Indeed, we are one of the few industrialised countries positioned well to do so.

Internationally, Australia will continue to lead on climate change. At the recent APEC meeting in Sydney, Australia – under the leadership of the Prime Minister – led the APEC economies to agree to a new regional consensus on the post-2012 international climate change framework, including a multilateral agreement that includes an overall global emissions reduction goal to which all countries contribute.

The Coalition Government will support international emissions reductions obligations that are environmentally effective, equitable and supportive of least-cost pathways for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The existing Kyoto Protocol does not deliver this. That is why we have not ratified Kyoto. Indeed, the structural flaws inherent in the Kyoto approach risk putting the world on the wrong pathway to addressing global warming.

Regionally, Australia is leading practical technology programs to reduce emissions, including the \$150 million Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate and the Australia-China Joint Co-ordination Group on Clean Coal. In addition, the \$200 million Global Initiative on Forests and Climate will help address the estimated 20 per cent of global emissions resulting from deforestation.

Domestically, the Prime Minister announced in June that Australia will establish a world-class emissions trading system, beginning no later than 2012. In doing so, Australia will set a long term goal for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. These are critical decisions for Australia's economic future. Unlike Labor, we believe in careful assessment and detailed modelling regarding the impact of a target on the Australian economy and Australian families.

The Coalition Government's plan to address climate change will be further strengthened with the Prime Minister's announcement on 21 October 2007 that a re-elected Coalition Government would establish a new Climate Change Fund.

Revenues for the new Climate Change Fund will come from the sale of permits to firms through the emissions trading scheme and will be re-invested into climate change and related initiatives. The Climate Change Fund will help to further support climate action and importantly, assist households most impacted by the transition to a low-carbon economy, particularly low-income earners and pensioners.

This initiative builds on the Government's comprehensive climate strategy. The Coalition recognises that low emissions energy sources have an important role to play in a carbon-constrained energy future. These include renewable energy, such as solar and wind, as well as fossil

fuel fired electricity generation where carbon capture and storage is used. Under the Government's \$500 million Low Emissions Technology Demonstration Fund, six projects have been announced covering clean coal and renewable energy technologies, leveraging \$2.5 billion in private sector investment.

In addition, the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target (MRET), introduced in 2001, has leveraged around \$3.5 billion in renewable energy investment and will increase renewable energy generation by more than 50 per cent by 2010. The Government has allocated over \$1 billion to support renewable energy, including solar and wind. To further support renewable and other clean energy technologies, the Coalition has announced it will introduce a single, comprehensive national Clean Energy Target (CET) of 30,000 gigawatt-hours per year by 2020. This is in addition to the baseline generation under MRET of around 16,000 gigawatt hours.

Based on electricity projections for 2020 the total clean energy share of electricity production, including the CET, is conservatively estimated to be around 15 per cent of Australia's electricity demand in 2020. The new CET, which will reduce red tape for industry, will drive additional investment in renewable and other low emissions electricity generation as the Australian emissions trading scheme is introduced.

We will continue to support households and communities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, building on our policies and programmes to phase out inefficient incandescent light bulbs, increase the solar panel rebate for households from \$4,000 to \$8,000, new rebates of \$1,000 for the installation of solar and heat pump water heaters, and vouchers to provide every Australian school with up to \$50,000 to install solar hot water systems and rainwater tanks.

Australia needs to be well placed to adjust to any future impacts associated with climate change which is why we have a world class climate change science capacity, in which the Government continues to invest. In April this year, the Prime Minister announced \$126 million for a National Climate Change Adaptation Centre, and \$44 million to enhance the core climate change science capability of the CSIRO.

What is your position regarding the loss of civil rights brought about by recent anti-terrorism legislation?

Over the past five years, the Coalition Government has developed comprehensive legislation to counter the threat of terrorism. This includes enactment of specific terrorism offences criminalising the commission of terrorist acts, acts done in preparation or facilitation of

terrorist acts, and financing of terrorists or terrorism. This strong legislative framework is enabling our law enforcement and intelligence agencies to deter, apprehend and punish the perpetrators of terrorism. The Government's counter-terrorism laws are designed to promote security and protect *all* members of the community from the threat of terrorism. In implementing these laws the Government is also promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

How do you intend to work for peace, especially in Iraq and in our region?

The Coalition remains committed to achieving security and stability in both Iraq and more generally, throughout the Middle East. Within Iraq, local authorities are increasingly taking the lead and working to defeat those inflicting violence upon innocent civilians and destabilising opportunities for a peaceable and civil society. Improved security is critical to creating the space and time Iraqis need to pursue political reconciliation.

In the Coalition's view, an early withdrawal from Iraq would embolden terrorists within Iraq and more widely, including within our own region. For this reason, it will maintain its commitment in Iraq until that nation no longer requires our support.