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Medicare and education going the way of the Murray

May 17 2003

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The federal Health Minister, Kay Patterson, is reported as saying that Labor's plans to restore bulk-billing will be funded by changes to private health insurance. Sounds like a good idea to me.

Denis Goodwin, Gosford, May 16.

When he became Prime Minister, John Howard told us there was no need for students to have a university campus because he had qualified in law without going there. It seems he didn't go to maths classes, either.

Howard claims a university qualification leads to a higher income. Thus it also leads to a higher return to the government in higher taxes which would more than pay for the higher education.

At 48 per cent marginal tax rate, over a working lifetime a graduate can expect to pay back an extra \$200,000 for every extra \$10,000 in annual income.

PS. For John's generation, we Commonwealth Scholarship holders paid our debt at a 60 per cent marginal tax rate! Do we get a refund?

G.E. Ford, Wahroonga, May 16.

Medibank is in crisis after 30 years and now Labor is promoting a riverbank to save the Murray-Darling river system. This politicking is another example of how the Australian people are being conned.

There is only one way our national waterways, coastal and inland, will be saved and that is with a national authority able to override all state responsibilities and controls.

Robert S. Buick, Mountain Creek (Qld), May 16.

Prime Minister, I've just heard that you were less than

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To the average newspaper reader, it's an invisible job. But nobody gets as much feedback - weird, wild and wise - as a letters editor. The *Herald's* Sam North explains.

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ensorious over Glenn McGrath's f---ing this, f---ing that and f---ing the other. I now feel I can "comfortably" say that your Government's education and health policies (outlined in the recent budget) are f---ing awful.

Dr Alan Krell, Sydney, May 15.

Brendan Nelson's educational vision for Australian students: let them eat books.

Greg Bowyer, Warradale (SA), May 16.

Mr Crean's budget reply shows he has the "ticker" and now he has the policies. Well done.

Bob Reynolds, Kinross (WA), May 16.

Simon Crean complains about the Liberals' \$4 a week tax cut. Can anyone remember the ALP's tax cuts? Thanks, Mr Howard.

Brendon Fehre, Broadmeadow, May 16.

To all those who ask where will the money come from for a decent health-care system, good universities with entrance for the deserving, the healing of an environment we have destroyed, respectful care for the disadvantaged and a reasonably secure retirement, the answer is: we are an affluent nation, we can afford it and the money will come from us all.

Angela Sands, Wombarra, May 16.

Leonora Ritter (Letters, May 16) goes to the very heart of conservative philosophy so eloquently expressed by the now very humane Malcolm Fraser - "Life wasn't meant to be easy."

This means build up private health and help a rich school acquire a new boatshed while public health languishes, and children at government schools trip on potholes in the asphalt.

Barrie Smillie, Duffy (ACT) May 16.

Simon Crean announces that he wants to concentrate on health, education and the environment. Peter Costello derides this as irresponsible. Sadly, I am disheartened at his response but not surprised.

Allan Grogan, Tamworth, May 16.

Well, I had my sandwich and milkshake yesterday, and Amanda Vanstone was right when she said you'd have to be lucky. I thought I might have just made it for \$5, but I forgot about the GST.

Steve Forsyth, Tumut, May 16.

Let them eat Big Macs ...

Serge Calvi, Como, May 16.

Carolyn van Langenberg (Letters May 16) wonders who will build the snazzy precincts at the private schools if there are no TAFEs for apprentice brickies, cement grinders and gardeners to attend.

No problemo. "They" will simply bring them in from South Korea, Thailand, India, South Africa and the Philippines on the lump (that is, only short-term labour contracts) as "they" have done on a steadily increasing basis for some years now. No IR or workers' comp issues, either.

Chris Berkeley, Seven Hills, May 16.

Simon Crean's alternative budget is designed to be "all things to all men" and is opportunistic and populist. It would appear that his proposals have not been properly costed (what's new?) and that a "blowout" in government expenditure under a future Labor government would be inevitable.

Michael J. Gamble, Belmont (Vic), May 16.

All Aussies who don't like (or don't want) Peter Costello's \$4 tax cut should donate all of it to the Salvation Army. Or, if they don't want to do that, send all those \$4 tax cuts to me.

John D. Ormond, Currumbin (Qld), May 16.

OK, Labor, how about concentrating on the main game now that Simon has delivered his reply to the budget? It's time to get behind him and make sure we rid ourselves of the most divisive government in memory.

Mary Lawson, Mortdale, May 16.

Now that we are moving towards privatised higher education, will the Government do anything to encourage the growth of scholarships and bursaries, which are so much a part of the other privatised tertiary systems such as the US?

Felicity Carter, Darlinghurst, May 16.

Strewth! Next Simon Crean will want to nationalise the banks, too.

Tom Ruut, Hurstville Grove, May 16.

Our Lleyton ... young, rude and so very Australian

Is Lleyton trying out for the cricket team? Maybe he should.

Peter Meadowfair, Richmond, May 16.

It's good to see Lleyton Hewitt, our Young Australian of the Year, providing such a great image of Australia to all prospective tourists. Maybe we should hurl abuse at them as they pass through Customs, just to let them know they've landed in the right country.

David Astin, Bankstown, May 16.

Let's not judge our cricketers or other sportspeople too hard or at least too fast. Sportspeople are people like us with everyday issues and are normally watched while under pressure.

I have seen adults acting badly while driving, queuing for petrol, supporting their kids at Saturday morning sports and trying to get a park at the shopping centre, and boards of directors not being honest with employees and shareholders, just to name a few things. I won't mention polities because that's too obvious.

Before we take the moral high ground to criticise, how about a long look at what type of message we're sending to our kids.

Steve Mitchell, Tooma, May 16.

Not good enough, Glenn. Not good enough, Lleyton. We know you love to win. We want you to win. But not in a way causing us to cringe with embarrassment. A little humility is way overdue.

David Brettell, Killarney Heights, May 16.

I am spoilt for choice to show my six-year-old boy a role model: the Young Australian of the Year, a fast bowling legend, a corporate leader, or the G-G?

Warwick Orme, Woollahra, May 16.

With his erratic behaviour on the tennis courts of the world, I wonder if Lleyton Hewitt has many friends? An anagram of his name is "the lonely twit".

Ian Maynard, Harbord, May 16.

Sad at being crossed out by diligence

The Red Cross does its best to ensure the blood it receives is safe (Editorial, May 16). I used to be a regular donor until I mentioned during the routine pre-donation interview that I was born in Argentina.

The nurse informed me my blood could not be used. Since the time I had first been approved as a donor 15 years

earlier, the Red Cross had discovered a parasite which might infect the blood of people who had lived in South America for more than three months.

I have not donated since then, and feel rather sad when the media report blood shortages because, whether or not I carry the parasite, my health is excellent.

William Nixon, Kings Langley, May 16.

Out of line

John Howard, you are neither head of state nor the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Please control your military uniform fetish and your use of returning service people to justify your decision to go to war in Iraq.

George Antonakos, Byron Bay, May 16.

Ticket runaround

I wondered what it would Costa (*Herald*, May 16) . Now I know - proposed higher ticket prices to pay for consultants who recommend higher rail ticket prices to pay for consultants who recommend higher ticket prices ...

Richard Andersen, Beverly Hills, May 16.

All talk, no real action

Andrew Leigh blames rising obesity levels on lack of self-control ("Slim hopes for a culture that lacks self-control", *Herald*, May 15). However his stereotyping of overweight people as guzz-ling gluttons has long been discredited. It is now thought that genetic predisposition largely explains why some people put on weight while others don't.

His only suggestion to deal with obesity is "a carefully targeted awareness campaign focused on those who are most vulnerable". But what chance does a government awareness campaign have up against the colossal sums spent by multinational companies on advertising their products? Children are one of the most vulnerable groups - why not regulate advertising of soft drinks and fast food on children's television, as was recommended in last year's obesity summit?

Dr Frank Beard, Darlinghurst, May 16.

Valid cause for fear

The most frightened people in Australia today must be the group of Iranian asylum seekers whose options, according to Philip Ruddock, will run out this week.

They are the people who have been offered a bribe of \$2000 each to agree to return to Iran voluntarily or face imminent deportation.

Among them are Sabian Mandaeans, members of a pre-Christian minority group who follow the teachings of John the Baptist. Their religion is not recognised in their home country and they are subject to ongoing persecution, considered unclean by their Muslim neighbours. Unable to undertake tertiary studies, the women marry young to avoid being harassed into converting to Islam.

Sadly, many of these gentle people have suffered further harassment and discrimination while detained at the Australian Government's pleasure.

The situation in Woomera was so bad that, when the detainees were moved to the new Baxter facility in South Australia, they were housed in a separate compound.

And the Government is threatening to send them back to Iran. Talk about out of the frying pan into the fire!

Mary Granger, Waverley, May 16.

Iraq was on our television screens 24 hours a day as "our" troops streamed across the desert and into Baghdad's city square.

All seems so quiet in Iraq these days. Yet a question keeps nagging at me. As our troops return, have we retreated into our castle?

Do we care? Are we, the brave victors who dropped bombs on Iraq, courageous enough to now deliver medicine and food (with equal gusto and praise) to the innocent who received our bombs?

Vic O'Callaghan, Springwood, May 16.

This is escalating into an epidemic

Brad Truran (Letters May 16) might have mentioned another escalating phenomenon, the stopper. This sub-species reaches the top or bottom of the ride, steps off and comes to a dead halt, as if trying to remember why he or she got on in the first place, as those behind suddenly find themselves marking time on a moving footway.

Mickey Pragnell, North Rocks, May 16.

I love to dash up escalators while munching orange cream biscuits. I'm not sure what that makes me apart from a good candidate for the letters page.

L. Mounser, Waverley, May 16.

Don't worry about the orange creams. The real worry is what happened to those little pillow biscuits with the squashed fly filling?

Alex Maynard, Round Corner, May 16.

A voice in the wilderness

Obviously I'm an oddity; I like my two teenage children (Letters, May 16) .

Randi Svensen, Katoomba, May 16.

Salary sacrifice

As a taxpayer, I really feel cheated if we are paying for two governors-general to perform the duties of one. However, if one governor-general should decide to donate all his salary to charity, then this would make this odd situation more palatable.

Philip Ho, Dianella (WA), May 16.

Goodness, I do hope the Queen doesn't pop over to check out what is going on. Is there a sofa bed in the study (whose study)?

Mary Purnell, Revesby, May 16.

Join 'em, even beat 'em

Narelle Hillman, re your problem of your sons and their bat-and-ball games (Heckler, May 16), why not join in the games and find out how much fun it can be? It provides my wife with untold amounts of pleasure to beat her two sons at ball games.

David Ryan, Homebush West, May 16.

Signs of danger

With all the rain, it seems you are more likely to injure yourself tripping on one of the thousands of "Danger - Wet Floor" signs than slipping on the wet floor.

Steven McCann, Lane Cove, May 16.

Spread the word

Congratulations to South Sydney Council for scrapping plans to spend \$63 million on Redfern Oval (*Herald*, May 16). Could you please have a word to the councillors at Liverpool?

James Cartwright, Wattle Grove, May 16

On a sticky wicket

Inclement: a word sportspeople use to suggest that English is their first language.

Grant Sorensen, Mt Riverview, May 16.

Targeted

Pooh to Mr Matulevicius and his one-upmanship (Letters, May 16). I only talk to people who *always* have their letters to the *Herald* published. I believe this may be my first sign of madness.

Sarah Wilks, Putney, May 16.

Postscript

"It's just not cricket," was Steve Barrett's sad and succinct take on the ugly sledging that marred Australia's loss in the fourth cricket Test against the West Indies. Chris Croese was less upset. "So the Australian cricket team are bad losers. That's probably because we don't lose that often," he wrote before suggesting, somewhat cheekily, that we should perhaps seek help from those "who have perfected being good losers, like England and in recent times the West Indies". Bruce Rosenberg combined two of the week's burning issues with his thought that "Dr Hollingworth should take advice from Adam Gilchrist" - and walk. Tony Thirlwell also saw fit to join the embattled Governor-General with another hot topic, saying it was disappointing to see that the G-G had infected a large number with SARS - "Severe Acute Republican Syndrome". Jeremy Spinks wanted to know if he could swap his \$11 tax cut "for the Prime Minister's widescreen TV?" while Larry Mounser went to the classics when he summed up the week: "It's been so bracing to read the bagging of Mr Howard and Dr Hollingworth on the Letters page. I love the smell of chardonnay in the morning."

Sam North, Letters Editor

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