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TRADE WITH CHINA / CHINESE AUSTRALIANS (FED)

Questions without notice - Senate

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and the Treasurer have brought to this parliament is not JobMaker—it's job replacer, job churner and job destroyer. One of the most concerning aspects of this bill, as we have seen before by this government, is that we know from experience with JobKeeper that public money will be misspent if there are not safeguards put in place.

The Australian public support protecting jobs and businesses through the pandemic. But they have a right to know how their money is being spent, and the record with JobKeeper is not encouraging. Let me give you one important example of the misuse of public funds that brought ordinary workers to this parliament today. Aviation workers today rallied outside Parliament House to call for an inquiry into the future of aviation in this country post-COVID. They were also protesting against the fact that over half a billion dollars in JobKeeper wage subsidies were paid to Qantas, only for this company to turn around and outsource 2,500 ground crew so they could fill these jobs for less money using labour hire companies and contractors. Think about it. Taxpayers gave hundreds of millions of dollars to Alan Joyce to keep Qantas workers connected to their jobs—and he banked the money, only to tell the families of 2,500 of his loyal employees that they were no longer connected to their jobs and if they wanted these jobs back they would have to bid for them at the lower rate. We've seen companies that take JobKeeper funds and pay huge dividends to their shareholders, and there was a parade of companies that took JobKeeper money, only to then pay their executives massive bonuses. If the government has learnt lessons from JobKeeper, it will make sure that this kind of abuse of public money and public trust cannot happen again.

Before we go into the flaws of the JobMaker scheme, let's back up to earlier in this tumultuous year. Let's go back to March 2020. This is when the coalition announced that they would be introducing a coronavirus supplement that would double the rate of the below-poverty JobSeeker allowance. They did this because they didn't initially want to introduce a wage subsidy. The United Kingdom, New Zealand and countries in Europe were rolling out wage subsidies as COVID hit. In Australia, Labor was calling on the government to introduce a wage subsidy. The union movement was pushing for a wage subsidy. Economists were pushing for a wage subsidy. We all agreed that the most important thing the government could do was to keep the connection between workers and their employers. But this government thought, 'Let's throw them all out on the Centrelink queues.'

It wasn't until they saw how long those Centrelink queues were, in the first few days—and then the Centrelink IT system crashed—when employers across Australia took their cues from the government that their businesses would get no support, that they started sacking their staff in the thousands. It wasn't until they were watching the queues grow before their eyes on TV that this transactional government decided it was in their own interest to legislate a wage subsidy. So JobKeeper was announced.

Labor did the right thing and supported JobKeeper, even though its flaws were enormous. We're appalled, and we still are, that a whole swathe of the economy was excluded from JobKeeper: casual workers, gig and contract workers, university workers, arts and the entertainment industry, airport workers, particularly those workers at dnata, and workers here on temporary visas. All of them are Australian taxpayers. All of them are critical to our economy. Many of them have partners and children to support, an economy to support.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, Senator Sheldon. You will be in continuation when the debate resumes.

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

### Trade with China

**Senator WONG** (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:00): My question is to the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, and Leader of the Government in the Senate, Senator Birmingham. I refer to alarming reports that Chinese authorities have taken the unilateral decision to ban some Australian exports. Can the minister advise the Senate of the total value of exports to China and how many Australian jobs rely on that market?

**Senator BIRMINGHAM** (South Australia—Minister for Finance, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:00): I thank Senator Wong for her question, a question that is on a topic of significant importance to Australia, to many Australian industries and to the jobs of many Australians.

China is Australia's No. 1 trading partner. It's an important trading partner, and we value what has been a longstanding relationship of mutual benefit to both of our economies. In terms of current estimates around trade volumes, the value of those volumes and the associated jobs, I'll happily come back to the chamber with details on those—with up-to-date estimates. But it is of great consequence, as I've noted, that our No. 1 trading partner has, in the course of this year, taken a number of decisions that have adverse potential consequences for Australian industry.

As a government we have been very clear about our disappointment over a decision in relation to Australia's barley growers that has seen China put in place tariffs which we don't believe are justified. Australia's farming

sector in no way is subsidised by government or dumps its product on foreign markets such as China. Nor do we believe that China's specific actions when it comes to the suspension of certain meat-processing facilities are justified for the length of time that it has decided on. And now we are concerned that we are seeing decisions in relation to the processing of live seafood that mean it is taking longer than should be the case. However, equally, we see many rumours, stories and areas of speculation that proved to be unfounded. Suggestions of complete, outright bans on Australian trade entering China do not appear to have materialised over recent days, but we continue to work through diplomatic and administrative channels to make sure that Australian exporters get answers where they can and access where they ought.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, Senator Birmingham. Senator Wong, a supplementary question?

**Senator WONG** (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:02): Has the minister made direct representations to his counterpart; and, if not, why not?

**Senator BIRMINGHAM** (South Australia—Minister for Finance, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:02): I have written to my counterpart on a number of occasions about a number of the issues that I just outlined. We have also made representations in addition to those written ones that I have made, as is publicly known, seeking ministerial dialogue, and it is a disappointment to Australia that, despite our willingness to sit down and engage as a mature partner in ministerial dialogue, China has been unwilling to reciprocate. Nonetheless, we retain a position and a posture of keeping the door open in that regard, and we will continue to ensure that that invitation is extended and our willingness to do so is there. In addition to those representations that I have made directly, as a government we have continued at ambassadorial level and at other diplomatic levels to engage solidly, steadfastly, to try to resolve the various technical issues and other issues, as well as to support Australian industry wherever we possibly can.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order. Senator Wong, a final supplementary question?

**Senator WONG** (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:03): Can the minister provide any assurance whatsoever to Australian exporters to China, and all those Australians whose jobs rely on these exports, that these exports will not be blocked upon arrival?

**Senator BIRMINGHAM** (South Australia—Minister for Finance, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:04): That really is a question for China. I note that Chinese authorities have denied the suggestion of there being an outright ban in relation to certain export products from Australia entering China. They have made those denials both in private and, through their media spokespeople, in public.

I note, as I said in answer to the primary question, that we have seen over the last few days shipments in a number of areas still proceed through customs, and we hope to see that continue—that China is true to its word, which it has given publicly and privately that there is not such an intervention, and does continue to allow trade to flow in accordance with commitments that China has made under the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement and in accordance with the commitments that China has made as a member of the World Trade Organization. Trade between our two nations is beneficial to people across both our nations and across our region. It's beneficial to people and businesses within China as well, and any disruption will harm them as much as it will us.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, Senator Birmingham. Before I call Senator Fawcett, I know I speak on behalf of all senators to say we're pleased to have been able to reopen the building and welcome back Australians, in person, to their parliament.

### **Australia-United States of America Relationship**

**Senator FAWCETT** (South Australia) (14:05): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Payne. Can the minister outline to the Senate the importance of Australia's enduring alliance with the United States of America, particularly in the Indo-Pacific?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:05): I thank Senator Fawcett very much for asking this question. Australia has congratulated President-elect Joe Biden and Vice-President-elect Kamala Harris on their victory in the United States election, joining friends and partners of the United States from around the world. This was always going to be a strongly contested election, and we congratulate the American people on what was ultimately a smooth, calm and extremely well attended process. It speaks to the vigour of American democracy that both tickets attracted more votes than any previous candidates in US history—not only the ticket of then Vice President Biden but also the ticket of President Trump and Vice President Pence. While President-elect Biden is, of course, yet to announce his administration, we know President-elect Biden and his team well, including from the government of four years ago.

The United States has been the linchpin of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific since 1945. It has helped to provide the basis for the rules based international order that has ensured, for so many decades, that the vast majority of disputes are resolved peacefully, through rules rather than through conflict. As one of the United States' closest allies, Australia is a proud contributor to the stability that this system has sustained. We are confident that, through continued US engagement in the Indo-Pacific, along with increasing engagement with and cooperation from other countries that share the same vision for our region, we can all continue to enjoy the benefits of an Indo-Pacific that is free and open, in which might does not equal right and in which all countries, large and small, can pursue their interests, free from coercion.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Fawcett, a supplementary question?

**Senator FAWCETT** (South Australia) (14:07): Can the minister outline how the Australian government will work with the US administration from 20 January next year to continue promoting an Indo-Pacific region that is free, open and prosperous?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:07): The Australia-US relationship is built on shared democratic values. We have worked well with the Trump administration, further illustrated by our successful AUSMIN talks in July, and we will do so until inauguration day, on 20 January. We look forward to continuing that work with the administration of President-elect Biden.

This pandemic has wrought economic pain across our region. It has exacerbated strategic challenges that Australia and the US can help to address, together. Australia and the United States are cooperating in many areas, including on health security, on countering disinformation, on resilient supply chains, on open trade as we emerge from the pandemic and on supporting partners' economic recovery through targeted infrastructure development. We believe in a region in which human rights are respected, the seas and skies are open, and trade and commerce can flourish unimpeded.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Fawcett, a final supplementary question?

**Senator FAWCETT** (South Australia) (14:08): Could the minister update the Senate on the government's further objectives for this bilateral relationship?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:09): We look forward to working with the administration of President-elect Biden on a range of our shared priorities for the Indo-Pacific. Together with Japan, we've recently announced the first project under our trilateral infrastructure partnership, in the form of an undersea internet cable to Palau, supporting economic recovery through quality infrastructure. As a signatory to the Paris Agreement, Australia looks forward to deepening cooperation with the US on technology that creates jobs and reduces emissions, consistent with our low-emissions Technology Investment Roadmap. We will continue to progress the work we've done with partnerships such as the Quad—made up of Australia, the United States, India and Japan—to maintain a region that is governed by rules, not power. No country is more important to Australia than the United States, and it's never been more vital that we stand together.

### **Chinese Australians**

**Senator AYRES** (New South Wales) (14:10): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Payne. During a Senate inquiry into issues affecting diaspora communities in Australia, Senator Abetz demanded that Australians of Chinese heritage 'unconditionally condemn the Chinese Communist Party dictatorship'. Does the minister support Senator Abetz's treatment of Australians of Chinese heritage?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:10): I thank Senator Ayres for his question. This matter was discussed in the estimates hearing, as Senator Ayres said. I made clear my views at the time. The pledge that this government believes people should make in Australia is to Australia. That is a clear and consistent position taken by both the Prime Minister, members of the cabinet and members of the government. In terms of the comments that Senator Ayres has referred to, I have also indicated that Australia is the bastion of robust democracy, on any interpretation. There will be views expressed with which people agree and disagree, but, most importantly, I will defend the right of people to talk about issues that are matters of concern and interest to them—across the parliament. And anyone who tries to pretend that this is only an issue apparently for one side of the parliament is either delusional or deceptive.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Ayres, a supplementary question?

**Senator AYRES** (New South Wales) (14:11): The Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has outlined the ways in which Australia's national interest is undermined by statements that can be used to portray Australia as intolerant, divided and discriminatory to various groups within our society. Does the minister

think Senator Abetz's comments could be used to portray Australia as intolerant, divided and discriminatory and therefore undermine our national interest?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:12): I encourage all Australians to make contributions to public discourse that contribute to cohesion, that contribute to the broad participation of all elements of the Australian community, including the diasporas that are so richly represented in this country and on both sides of politics.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Ayres, a final supplementary question?

**Senator AYRES** (New South Wales) (14:12): Why on earth has the government refused to condemn Senator Abetz's conduct, which is divisive at home and damaging internationally?

**Senator PAYNE** (New South Wales—Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Women) (14:12): My views were carefully put on the record and clearly put on the record in Senate estimates. I have reiterated them here now. I wish that those opposite would in fact endeavour at some stage, somewhere, sometime to make a constructive contribution to this discussion.

### COVID-19: Small Business

**Senator McGRATH** (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:13): My question is to the Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Senator Cash. Small business is the engine room of our economy, with over 600,000 small businesses in my home state of Queensland, and nationally employing approximately six million Australians. Can the minister please inform the Senate how the Morrison government's 2020-21 budget is delivering an Australian response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recession by making crucial investments to support small businesses to invest, grow and employ more Australians?

**Senator CASH** (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:13): I thank Senator McGrath for his question. Senator McGrath, as you'd be aware, small and family businesses are the backbone of the Australian economy, and that is why the Morrison government backs them every step of the way. Certainly, they have been greatly impacted by COVID-19. But that is also why the budget in 2020-21 is a budget that firmly invests in our small businesses in Australia.

Our \$74 billion JobMaker plan puts small and family businesses at the heart of our economic recovery because they are the job makers in this country. As a government, we are continuing to put in place incentives for small businesses to prosper, grow and create more jobs for Australians; programs to help them to innovate, because COVID-19 has shown small businesses that they must have the ability to innovate to survive; and, of course, reforms to make it easier for small businesses to do business.

We're also incentivising small businesses to invest and employ through investments that minimise risk. We've implemented temporary full expensing and temporary loss carry-back. We've also put in place wage subsidies, because we want small businesses out there to be able to bring on new Australians into the workforce. We've put in place around \$5.2 billion in wage subsidies, including helping small businesses to take on their first apprentice, which is so important, or, alternatively, to give a young person the chance to return to the workforce. Our extension of the small-business tax concessions to around 20,000 small businesses will also remove disincentives for them to invest in training in their current workforce.

As I've said, small businesses are the backbone of the Australian economy. The Morrison government will always back them, every step of the way.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, Senator Cash. Senator McGrath, a supplementary question?

**Senator McGRATH** (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:15): How does this build on the coalition government's strong record of assisting Australia's small businesses to invest, employ more Australians and pay less tax since 2013?

**Senator CASH** (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:15): That's right. This is a government that, since the day we were elected back in 2013, has continued to put in place the policy framework to allow small and family businesses across Australia to prosper, to grow and to create more jobs for Australians. Small businesses are the backbone of the Australian economy. The coalition has a strong record on delivering policies that assist small businesses to grow and to employ more Australians. One of those policies, of course, is to fast-track tax relief for small and medium businesses so that they can invest and create more jobs. We know that if they can take back a bit of the money that they've paid to the government they will invest it back into their business. We're improving small-business access to finance so that they can access the money they need to invest back into their business to grow it and create more jobs for Australians, and importantly, we're ensuring that they are paid on time. Cash flow is king for small businesses, and that's why we're ensuring they're paid on time.

agricultural sector will be considered to be independent for the purposes of youth allowance. We believe this is a significant pathway that shortens the time for people to get independence and helps our horticultural sector.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, Senator Ruston! Senator Davey, a final supplementary question?

**Senator DAVEY** (New South Wales—Nationals Whip in the Senate) (14:38): Thank you, Minister. How is the government supporting Australian families through changes to the paid parental leave scheme?

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:38): I'm pleased to inform the Senate that, as part of the budget, we have provided support to new parents whose employment was interrupted as a result of the coronavirus pandemic by introducing some additional concessional paid parental leave work tests. Under the normal rules, parents are required to have worked 10 of the 13 months prior to the birth or adoption of their child to qualify for paid parental leave. What we have done is extend that period so that it's 10 of the last 20 months for births and adoptions, and this will be in effect from 22 March 2020 until 31 March 2021. This temporary change increases access to paid parental leave for approximately 12,800 families who were previously connected to the workforce but have lost their jobs as a result of the COVID pandemic and would otherwise have been able to qualify. We understand many people made the decision about family planning prior to COVID, and we want to make sure those families don't miss out.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, Senator Ruston!

### Trade with China

**Senator WATT** (Queensland) (14:39): My question is to the Minister for Trade, Senator Birmingham. Senator Canavan has dismissed the impact of the worsening trade relationship with China on the Australian economy and jobs, saying:

All we're being asked to do is give up our access to cheap TVs.

Is Senator Canavan correct to dismiss the potential impact of this trade dispute on Australian jobs?

**Senator BIRMINGHAM** (South Australia—Minister for Finance, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:39): I haven't seen the quote attributed to Senator Canavan, and so I won't take at face value the extract without seeing the full context of the remarks that Senator Canavan is likely to have made. As I said before, we do recognise the importance of the trade relationship with China. Indeed, I'm happy to give the Senate some of the detail that I took on notice before in relation to Australia's total two-way trade for goods and services export, valued in 2019 at \$251.4 billion. Our goods exports in 2019 were \$149.2 billion and, over the latest ABS figures, which are for the 2018-19 period, there were some 8,184 Australian merchandise exporters engaged in trade with China. So indeed these are important jobs.

It's also important that Australia act at all times to behave consistently with our values and our national interest across all spheres. So we do that, seeking to absolutely protect our values as a trading nation: our willingness and desire to engage openly and in a rules based manner, to trade with as many nations as possible and for them to reciprocate in doing so. But we also take very seriously the need to protect our critical infrastructure and our communications system, and to have foreign investment laws that are appropriate and that withstand different strategic challenges that we will face as a nation from time to time. It's crucial that as a country we stand strong, clear and consistent in the approaches we take to those types of issues. That's the approach that our government brings—a steady hand in relation to all aspects of Australia's values and our position—and that is exactly what we'll continue to do, whether it be across strategic spheres or economic spheres.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Watt, a supplementary question?

**Senator WATT** (Queensland) (14:42): Speaking of steady hands, earlier this year coalition MP George Christensen set up a website to stoke anti-China sentiment and threatened to summons the Chinese ambassador to answer questions in a parliamentary committee. Has the minister spoken to Mr Christensen about his reckless actions, given the number of jobs dependent on Australia's trade relationship with China?

**Senator BIRMINGHAM** (South Australia—Minister for Finance, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:42): Mr Christensen is one of many coalition MPs who I have spoken to during the course of this year about Australia's trade and the opportunities in terms of ensuring that we continue to get the perspective right of holding a calm and steady hand in all aspects of our relationship and how we deal with China. This is not a relationship in which we want to see politics played in any sphere, and nor do we want to see that occur in relation to any of our international relationships. That is crucial right across the board. It's a message that applies to anybody, on all sides of the chamber or the crossbench, in that regard—that in relation to our international relationships it is

important that we hold to a firm and steady approach in all of the different aspects of the policies that we have to deal with on the international stage.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Watt, a final supplementary question?

**Senator WATT** (Queensland) (14:43): Former Director-General of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, Ambassador to the United States and secretary of the departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence Dennis Richardson has warned of the impact of gratuitous and inflammatory actions by government members on Australia's relationship with China. Does the minister share his concerns?

**Senator BIRMINGHAM** (South Australia—Minister for Finance, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:43): As I said just before, it's my expectation that the best approach across this parliament and, indeed, across our community is for nobody to engage in politically charged or inflammatory approaches in relation to any of our foreign relations. However, it is also important, as Senator Payne articulated clearly in her response earlier today, that we are a free-speaking democracy with a free media. In a free-speaking democracy with a free media, there will be opinions shared from time to time and points of view made from time to time with which we'll not all agree and with which we may have fundamental disagreements. But the value we place on being able to have those commitments or those statements made is crucial and paramount for, indeed, our approach as a free-speaking democracy with a free media. We will defend those rights all of the time whilst ensuring the government's position in our engagement is always true to those and other values.

### COVID-19: Infrastructure

**Senator ASKEW** (Tasmania) (14:45): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development, Senator Cash. How does the Morrison government's JobMaker budget build on our record to support infrastructure delivery, create jobs and rebuild the economy following the economic impacts of COVID-19, particularly in regional Australia?

**Senator CASH** (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:45): I thank Senator Askew for the question. The Morrison government understands that if you invest in infrastructure you are investing in the creation of jobs. That's why, through our budget 2020-21, we continue our record investment in job-creating, economy-boosting infrastructure. The recent budget also sees additional critical funding for transport infrastructure across all states and territories in Australia. The government's transport infrastructure program has now increased to a new record \$110 billion over 10 years, from 2020-21. The new projects that we have announced in the budget are expected to support 30,000 direct and indirect jobs over the construction lives of the projects, at a time when we know Australia needs job-creating policies. This further investment builds on the significant investment that the Morrison government has already made in infrastructure, with projects already under construction supporting around 100,000 direct and indirect jobs over the life of the projects.

Our infrastructure program is making a difference right across Australia. We now have had more than 60 projects starting construction in the last financial year, and more than 50 projects have been completed. Not only that, but our investment in our regions extends to every one of the 537 local government areas across the nation. In fact, the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program delivers a benefit to every council, no matter where it is. If you invest in infrastructure, as this government continues to do, you invest in jobs for Australians.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Askew, a supplementary question?

**Senator ASKEW** (Tasmania) (14:47): How has the government's accelerated infrastructure spend in response to COVID-19 supported job creation and economic recovery, particularly in my home state of Tasmania?

**Senator CASH** (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:47): Since the commencement of COVID-19, the government has committed to investing an extra \$14 billion in new and accelerated infrastructure projects over the next four years, supporting the creation of around 40,000 jobs. This includes \$1.5 billion being provided for shovel-ready projects and targeted road safety works right across Australia. We're working closely with state and territory governments to rebuild our economy and, of course, to support more jobs being created.

The budget has also provided \$2 billion for easy-to-deliver road safety treatments to be provided to state governments on a 'use it or lose it' basis. This will ensure that this funding is rolled out quickly and the benefits can flow to communities as soon as possible. Senator Askew, there is \$150 million for the Midway Point Causeway and the Sorell Causeway in Tasmania.

**The PRESIDENT:** Senator Askew, a final supplementary question?

and what I've seen over the course of the last 18 months—that is, a stoic refusal to answer questions, a stoic refusal to provide timely responses to questions on notice and a stoic refusal to effectively discharge the responsibilities of ministers in this parliament.

Question agreed to.

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

### Chinese Australians

#### Trade with China

**Senator AYRES** (New South Wales) (15:19): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Minister for Finance (Senator Birmingham) and the Minister for Foreign Affairs (Senator Payne) to questions without notice asked by Senators Ayres and Watt today relating to Australia's relationship with China.

I thought that today's question time was pretty instructive. The strongest indication I think was when Senator Birmingham had an opportunity to signal a change in direction and an effort under his leadership to respond effectively to these questions of national interest, and I'm disappointed to see that the new leader in this place failed that test. It should have been a pretty easy test really. On one side, there's a national interest, and on the other side there's the partisan interest. It's manifestly in the national interest to call out the conduct of Senator Abetz, and it's manifestly in the national interest to call out the conduct of Senators Canavan, Christensen and Kelly in relation to their wild, unhelpful and reckless comments in relation to the whole host of issues that go to our relationship with China. So weak is Senator Birmingham's grip on the coalition caucus, so shallow his commitment to principle and to the national interest, that he squibbed it.

Australians of Chinese descent will be watching very closely. What they will see is that, for all the fundraising dinners, all of the nice words and all the grooming of members of the Chinese-Australian community, when push comes to shove the Liberals and Nationals will never stand for the Chinese-Australian community, not even when it's easy, not even when it's straightforward. It should be straightforward. What we heard was Minister Payne in here exhorting people in the Senate, other senators, to follow her example that the most important principle here was freedom of speech. Well, there are other principles that matter too—principles of responsibility, principles of leadership, principles of not being reckless when it comes to the national interest.

I thought that what Senator Payne said came very close to what we remember Senator Brandis saying, that everyone's got a right to be a bigot. People in this place have responsibilities. I say that Senator Abetz was wrong in his approach on the Foreign Affairs Committee for three reasons: (1) it was morally reprehensible, (2) what Senator Abetz said reinforces the Chinese Communist Party line that they are delivering to people of Chinese descent all around the world and in Australia, and (3) it reinforces the Chinese Communist Party government's propaganda line within China.

There is an important distinction here. I don't say that Senator Abetz is a racist. I disagree strongly with Senator Abetz, but I don't see him that way. But his conduct here is the result of assumptions that are driven by views about race. What he asked those three witnesses to do was unconditionally condemn the Chinese Communist Party dictatorship—despite its McCarthyist overtones. But at least Joe McCarthy asked everyone the same question; Senator Abetz only asked those witnesses—nobody else. They came with a genuine submission to this diaspora inquiry, talking about the issues of interference, the issues of dislocation, asking for a safe space for debate and support for their engagement but they had the door slammed in their face. Just when they were asking for tolerance and inclusion, they got the cold shoulder.

What Senator Abetz said reinforces the propaganda line that is taken by the government in China to Australians of Chinese descent. They say, 'You will never be accepted here'. We know this isn't true. We know that since the gold rush Chinese Australians have been a core part of the Australian story. But Senator Abetz sent the opposite message. People of good faith seeking inclusion were given the cold shoulder. Finally, sadly, Senator Abetz's message was a propaganda victory for the Chinese government in the context of the difficult issues we face in our relationship today. (*Time expired*)

**Senator STOKER** (Queensland) (15:25): There's an enormous immaturity on display in the way that we have heard Labor talk about Australia's relationship both with China and Australians of Chinese descent in question time today and in the froth and bubble of Senator Ayres's contribution a moment ago. In question time they started out by demanding apologies—the politics of condemnation—by finding a one-liner from a member of the government with which they disagree and trying to make that into something that can be extrapolated into itself being the source of jeopardy for the relationship between our two countries, and demanding that there be such a grovelling approach that one cannot even exercise one's right to speak in the way that Senator Abetz has. Then, in



their third question, they went on the offensive on the question of foreign interference in a way that reflects that very insensitivity of which they accuse Senator Abetz. I've got to say, that reflects an awfully shallow understanding of the significance of the relationship between our two important countries.

Let me say this at the outset: those opposite build their arguments when it comes to the relationship between Australia and China on what is fundamentally an underestimation of the impressive and strong community of Australians of Chinese descent we have in this country. Australians of Chinese descent are valued members of the Australian community. They are avid entrepreneurs. They are champions of family business. They are people who value family. They value the freedoms we have in this country for many of them, and the very reason they value them is they don't have that privilege in the country from which they came.

When I go around in my home state of Queensland and talk to Australians of Chinese descent, they are so thankful for the freedoms that we have here—freedoms from many of the most abhorrent practices that we all know happen but often don't want to talk about happening in other countries, including in China—and they say 'thank you' for a government that is prepared to ensure that they are not the subject of intimidation. They are thankful for a government that is prepared to protect those from the diaspora who have made Australia home but who want to live by Australian values.

Can I tell you: I'm so proud of those Chinese Australians. They are wonderful contributors to this country. But let's not reduce what is a really serious issue—that is, the maintenance of an effective trading relationship in the interests of the ability of Australian producers through many industries, particularly in agriculture—to something that is a glib one-liner. We always need to stand true to Australia's values. And do you know what? This government has made it very clear, in the words of the Prime Minister, that Australia will always stand by its sovereignty and that Australia will always stand by its values, will always be consistent with those and will never trade them away. We will maintain our integrity whether it's in our foreign investment rules, in our rules about interference in Australia's political situations or about the integrity of our communications networks, and all those things. Do you know what? China does exactly the same thing. They protect their integrity of their systems according to their values, and they do it unapologetically.

Australia does the same. We act in the interests of Australians—today, tomorrow and every day of the week. We won't apologise for that. We will fight for it every day in the interests of the beef producer in Longreach Queensland as much as in the interests of the Australian baby formula exporter and as much as in the interests of the Australian iron ore producer. That is the honest, subtle truth of it.

**Senator WATT (Queensland) (15:30):** I think all Australians are watching with increasing dismay the escalation of what seems to be a serious trade dispute between Australia and China. Every day, we see increasing reports of restrictions from China on imports of Australian beef, barley, wine, coal, sugar and other products. These bans and these restrictions have particular significance in my home state of Queensland, given the volume of exports from Queensland to China and the number of jobs that hang off those exports.

To give you some sense of this, I just want to quickly quote from a report issued recently by Queensland economist Gene Tunny. He observes:

Queensland is obviously heavily exposed to trade restrictions from China ... Queensland's annual goods exports to China of circa \$25 billion amount to around 7% of our Gross State Product. Ongoing trade restrictions from China would cause major economic damage, especially in our regional economies such as Central Queensland and Mackay which are highly dependent on resources and agriculture. And, in the lead up to the 2020-21 Queensland Budget which Treasurer Dick—

that's Queensland treasurer Cameron Dick—

will hand down on 1 December, I should note that Chinese trade restrictions would be a big blow to our budget via impacts on royalties and other revenues such as payroll tax and stamp duty which would be lower due to the economic shock. Sure, our exporters may be able to find alternative markets in which to sell, but that will take time, and they may have to heavily discount their products to find non-Chinese buyers.

So this trade dispute is not just an academic exercise in my home state of Queensland. As Dr Tunny has observed, this has very real impact on Queensland's exports, on Queensland jobs, and on royalties that pay for services right around Queensland, in particular in regional economies such as Central Queensland and Mackay. That's why I have been so concerned to see some of the inflammatory rhetoric coming from LNP members of parliament and senators from Queensland. You would think that if anyone was passionate about making sure that Queensland jobs are protected and that Queensland exports grow rather than shrink it would be representatives in this chamber and in this parliament from Queensland.

I am not for a moment saying that we should be quiet about our concerns about our national interest or our values in relation to China or any other country. We should always speak up about our national interest. We should always protect our values. But this has to be done responsibly and maturely. As those figures that I have

just pointed to demonstrate, there is too much on the line for reckless and inflammatory rhetoric. The responsible and mature approach is the approach that Labor have taken. We have consistently spoken up about concerns that we have regarding the human rights approach of China, around national security issues and around defence issues as well. Even just in the last few days we have expressed our concern about the escalating trade dispute with China and we have expressed our concern about what this might mean for Australian exporters and for Australian jobs. It is one thing to speak up responsibly and maturely about our values, our national interest and our defence concerns; it is another thing entirely to engage in the reckless and inflammatory rhetoric that we are increasingly seeing from members of this government. That is not going to help. That will not do anything to advance our national interests, it is not going to do anything to advance our values and it is certainly not going to do anything to protect Queensland jobs and Queensland exports.

So that's why you have to ask the question of why members of parliament like the member for Dawson, Mr Christensen, are going out there and saying in relation to the COVID-19 virus that:

... the CCP knowingly and deliberately allowed these "ambassadors of death" to infect the rest of the world.

Is that advancing our national interest in a mature and responsible fashion, or is that just recklessly going out and inflaming tensions, which has a practical consequence on Queensland jobs and Queensland exports? Similarly,

Senator Canavan has recently said:

If China buys less of our coal that means we will have some to build our own new HELE coal plants in Australia ...

He's also gone on to say, 'All we're being asked to do is give up our access to cheap TVs.' This is a serious issue that deserves to be taken on responsibly and maturely. It doesn't deserve to be used as a way of generating Facebook likes which put Queensland jobs at risk. (*Time expired*)

**Senator ANTIC** (South Australia) (15:35): We have heard conflation of words this afternoon in question time and afterwards that raise concerns from this side of the chamber. We've heard words bandied around such as 'McCarthyism' and 'recklessness'. I put to the chamber that, in fact, recklessness is conflating this issue into something that it is not. The fact of the matter is that China is our largest trading partner, and it is likely to remain so into the foreseeable future. That's because trade has brought mutual benefits and lifted hundreds of millions of people in the region out of poverty. As we emerge from this particularly difficult time in the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that trade continues to be open, transparent and useful as a tool to economic recovery.

The Australian government, through its embassy in Beijing and its agencies in Canberra, has sought to clarify media reports of restrictions and unsubstantiated reports of possible bans on Australian products. Such reports, if true, would raise serious questions about compliance with trade rules and would be inconsistent with statements from the Chinese leadership—including those made last week at the China International Import Expo—on its commitment to open trade and the multilateral trading system. We in this government expect that China will continue its trade relationship with Australia in a manner consistent with its obligations.

Chinese authorities have confirmed increased testing of Australian live lobster imports, on which the Australian government had been urgently seeking clarification. Australia has strong regulatory controls that underpin the biosecurity, integrity and safety of our exports—safeguards that support our international reputation as a reliable exporter of safe, high-quality produce. The Australian government continues to expand trade opportunities for exporters, most recently through the CPTPP and trade agreements with Indonesia, Peru and Hong Kong. The PACER Plus will enter into force next month, and will expect to sign the regional comprehensive economic partnership agreement before the end of this year, as well as negotiating trade agreements with the EU, UK and the Pacific Alliance.

The issue regarding the number of our commodities and other exports is, of course, of great concern to the government and of great concern to those exporters. The Australian government has been standing by our exporters in ways this country has not seen in a long time, particularly during this difficult time of the pandemic. The 'technical issues', as they've been described by the Chinese government, will now be worked through. But, as the Prime Minister has said, Australia will stand by our sovereignty. We will always stand by our values, we will always be consistent with those and we will never trade them away. Whether it be the integrity of foreign investment rules, the integrity of rules of interference in political situations here in Australia or the integrity of communications networks, we will maintain that integrity. We will continue to raise our voice on matters that are important to the Australian people, and we will do that consistently, so that these things can't be traded away.

And there are matters of concern, which the Australian government has raised over and over again and will continue to do so, so that we stand by our values. As the Prime Minister has said, it is critical for Australia that we work this relationship in a way that's consistent with the comprehensive strategic partnership. It's an important partnership. We believe it's an important relationship, but it's a relationship that will always be based on Australia's national interest and mutual benefit between Australia and China.

These deeply troubling rumours about trade relations are, in categories, as the trade minister has said, predominantly rumours which are unconfirmed and unsubstantiated, and people need to treat them in the manner in which they have been described. It is important for our exporters that we give them all the support that they require through these difficult times in their engagement with the Chinese authorities and their business counterparts on mainland China and other parts of China, including Hong Kong. The importers and customers who have had such a demand for— (*Time expired*)

**Senator CHISHOLM** (Queensland) (15:40): I think we know who won the battle in here. Senator Birmingham clearly won the battle. He gave Senator Antic a slap down in his answer to the question in parliament today and then sent him out to take note here. We know that this is a very serious issue that Australians are anxious about, and it is something that is going to be of real consequence for Australian workers and, as Senator Watt said, Queensland workers. There is increasing anxiousness amongst Australians about the mismanagement of this important relationship.

So many businesses have geared up over time to do trade with China, and that is being put at risk because of the mismanagement of this government. There has been a lack of action from this government to fix up this relationship. There's been zero leadership from responsible ministers, and they've outsourced the relationship to the backbench. That has had real consequences for Australians. There's no better example of that than in the work that the member for Dawson, George Christensen, and Senator Canavan have been doing this year, which has undermined our relationship with China. It is having a real impact on Australian workers.

I want to take point with Senator Stoker's contribution, in which the senator accused us of immaturity. We are the ones who are treating this seriously, because we know how significant this is. It's the government backbenchers—the ones that are causing the trouble—that are putting this relationship at risk and doing further damage. It was rather astounding that the Leader of the Government in the Senate, Senator Birmingham, said that he was a steady hand on this issue. Nothing could be further from the truth. I think, if you look at the industries that have been impacted, they would say nothing other than that he has been a dead hand on this issue, because he is not taking this up to the government to fix these issues and is not in a leadership position to take advantage of that.

Last year, China accounted for a significant proportion of our exports, and they included barley, Queensland timber, wine, lobsters, sugar, coal, copper and meat. Behind these exports are some of the biggest employers that Queensland have, and they have been such a significant part of the export industry that we have seen develop over time. But already we are seeing that this is having consequences across Australia—in particular, in Queensland. Just on the radio last week I heard the CEO of Sirromet Wines, which is an iconic brand in Queensland and a place, particularly in Brisbane, that many people are aware of. They've been exporting 40 per cent of their wine to China, and that is being put at risk because of the mismanagement of this relationship by this government. We also know there have been reports in Mackay of the volume exported through the Hay Point terminal—the coal terminal—declining this year again. It puts jobs at risk, and it puts economic development at risk as well.

Business is rattled. They have been looking for leadership from the government, which has been so far found wanting. Workers are getting anxious. We know they are following these developments. They know that these sorts of repercussions have a direct impact on them, their livelihoods and their families, and the government is rudderless on this issue. You only have to look at the quote from Minister Birmingham in *The Australian* from a couple of days ago, where he said:

Continued uncertain and inconsistent messages from China are heightening risks and undermine the statements made by President Xi at this year's China International Import Expo.

He's saying that it's China's uncertain and inconsistent messages that are having an impact. What about the inconsistent messages from the government and their backbench? That is what is having an impact on this relationship, and it is something that is increasingly causing anxiousness amongst employers and businesses but also workers as well.

There's no doubt that the performance from Minister Birmingham today, for those who were able to see it, would not fill Australians with confidence. Australians understand the importance of this relationship. It is a complex one but it is an important one that we get right. So far, the government have completely mismanaged it and, under questions from the opposition today, you would have no confidence that they will be able to fix this relationship, which is such an important one for Australian businesses and Australian workers. It is important that the government show leadership on this issue and come to the Australians on this. (*Time expired*)

Question agreed to.

### Climate Change

**Senator WATERS** (Queensland—Leader of the Australian Greens in the Senate) (15:45): I move: