



Labor out of step on the best path off welfare



PAUL
FLETCHER

Every Australian who moves from welfare to work achieves a personal victory.

When you're working, you have a sense of confidence and you know you're contributing to society.

Of course you and your family are much better off financially.

It's also good news for everybody else in the community as well.

We have a strong welfare system in Australia. For most people, the best form of welfare is a job.

That's why our Liberal National government has made it such a strong focus to move Australians from welfare to work.

Since we came to office, we've created about 1.2 million jobs.

The proportion of working-age Australians receiving income benefits at June 30 was 14.3 per cent — its lowest level in 30 years.

That's a sharp drop on the previous year's 15.1 per cent and much lower than 16.5 per cent when Labor left office. Welfare dependency is falling be-

cause our plan for a stronger economy is working and most of the jobs being created are full-time.

Over the past year, full-time employment growth has accounted for 63.1 per cent of the total increase in employment. A key part of helping Australians return to the workforce is the principle of mutual obligation.

This is the idea that if you are being supported through a welfare benefit paid for by the taxes of your fellow Australians, you have an obligation to look for a job, do some training or meet other requirements.

Doing things that will improve your skills builds self-worth and increases your employment prospects.

Most Australians agree that welfare recipients need to have a go to get a go. Twenty years ago, the OECD said mutual obligation was part of the basis of the Australian income support system.

The Labor Party has a very different approach that would greatly weaken mutual obligation. Labor says it will scrap the Jobactive network, which helps unemployed Australians find work and administers the mutual obligation arrangements.

Of course there's scope for Jobactive to work better and that's why we

commissioned an expert review of it last year.

We're using digital technology to offer more tailored and personalised services to help people find work faster. These improvements will better connect employers with workers when they need them, and free up employment service providers to

focus on helping the people who need it most. Labor wants to axe Jobactive.

The Liberal-National government wants to modernise it and make it better. Labor is offering lots of talk about the way we support unemployed Australians to return to the workforce.

But look at the scoreboard.

Unemployment was 5.7 per cent when Labor left office.

It is now 5.1 per cent. Mutual obligation has been a key element.

That is good news for every Australian who has moved from welfare to work — and good news for our nation.

Paul Fletcher is the Minister for Families and Social Services in the federal Liberal-National government