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MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND DEREGULATION
SPEECH

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE 2012 AUSTRALIAN RAINBOW
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My thanks for the invitation to speak at your national conference, and my thanks for the extraordinary commitment you have demonstrated to the cause of equality.

I see so many champions of equality here today: Labor people, community leaders, activists and members of parliament. This audience itself is a reminder that social change has always been, and will always be, driven by the building of partnerships and alliances, and I thank you all for your work – for your work to date and the work to come.

Today, I want to speak to three questions – Why Labor? Why Rainbow Labor? Why marriage equality?. Three questions that I think go to the heart of how change is imagined and how change is delivered.

I want to start with the first question because restating who we are and why we are Labor is important.

I know there are some in the audience today who are not members of the Labor party, and to those I would say that it is events like this that highlight the strengths of our great party. Strength in the clarity of our values; strength in the determination to see our values delivered as real change; a strength that is embodied in our people.

But these are challenging times for the Labor movement, and in these times it is important to recall why we do what we do, why we hold our beliefs, why we are Labor.

And it is also important to be reminded that in this campaign, a campaign for equality, we see Labor values in action.

The Labor party stands for a fair go, a just society and a strong economy.

A fair go describes our tradition of fairness, of equality, of opportunity. A just society speaks to the principles which underpin our community, our rights and our responsibilities, and their expression in our legal and social institutions. And we understand that a strong economy is the foundation for prosperity and fairness.

The contemporary meaning of these principles change – the fair go today differs from that which would have been described by my parent's generation, just as my daughter's generation will probably have a different view.

The common insight these principles share is the relationship between the community and the individual; that the character and hallmarks of our community bear upon the aspirations and outcomes for the individual and that the character of our community is expressed in its treatment of all of its members.

So we understand that a community that marginalises is not strong – that unity is not created through exclusion, that equality is realised through opportunity, and that prosperity must be created in order to be shared.

The Labor project is not an easy one, but it is a rewarding one. We are a progressive party, a reforming party. And we are also a party of government.

Our task is to marry a mandate to govern with progressive values and economic responsibility. This task is shared by no other movement and no other political party in this country, and it is a task which brings with it certain imperatives.

The first is that we cannot simply speak to those who agree with us. We also have to persuade those who don't.

A party of government doesn't just seek a Senate quota or a particular seat; we cannot play only to a narrow audience. We have to build agreement, we have to advocate, we have to convince. And we have to stay the course, even when it is not popular.

We also cannot avoid the hard policy questions that come with the responsibility of government.

These are questions that are not answered by the repetition of slogans. Rather, these are decisions which have to be made in light of the evidence, of weighing competing priorities and that must be delivered within finite financial resources. Policy solutions are generally not as simple as they might sound, and they have to be funded.

It is one thing to call for more spending to fix a problem, it is entirely another to develop the policy and to make the hard decisions to find the resources to implement it.

Talking about change is one thing. Delivering it is another.

So I say to those who feel disenchanting, to the champions of cynicism, and to those who say it doesn't matter who governs: imagine an Australia today without the contribution of Labor governments.

Imagine an Australia without Medicare, an Australia without a fair system of wages and conditions, or an Australia not shaped by the post-war wave of immigration. Imagine an Australia where tertiary education is closed to those unable to afford it, an Australia with a White Australia policy on the statutes book, an Australia without legal recognition imbued in the Racial Discrimination Act or the Sex Discrimination Act, or an Australia which could not have celebrated the anniversary of the Mabo decision with pride last week. Imagine an Australia that had not recognised native title; that had not

acknowledged the wrongs inflicted on the stolen generation, or an Australia where working people were denied a dignified retirement through superannuation.

Governments do matter.

Having Labor governments matters.

It matters to the pensioners whose pensions have increased.

It matters to the many young Australians in university, including the 40,000 from disadvantaged families who now have this opportunity. It matters to the Australians in work, with over 800,000 jobs created since we took office. It matters that our economy is growing and that unemployment is low. It matters that the NBN is being rolled out to all Australians providing a platform for innovation, enabling today's firms to build tomorrow's businesses. It matters that we are finally pricing carbon, to make our contribution to tackling climate change, and to drive the investment in clean energy and clean technology that is key to our future economy.

It matters to our community. It mattered when a Labor government first decriminalised homosexuality in my home state of South Australia, years before many of you were born, and it mattered when Federal Labor legislated to remove discrimination against same sex couples across federal laws from superannuation to Medicare and many more.

And the change to our party's platform here in Sydney last year mattered.

We campaigned. We stood together and we saw that change is possible.

These gains were achieved because people organised and people advocated. People like you.

Which brings me to my second point – why Rainbow Labor?

The campaign for marriage equality, for the change in the party's platform, has been successful because of the people in this room and our supporters. It would not have happened, but for Rainbow Labor. The hard-working people who make up this organisation have understood very clearly a key truth – that change demands we speak not only to those who agree with us, but also to those who do not, and that to enable change requires spreading understanding, the building of alliances and partnerships; the finding of common ground.

Commentating from the sidelines is a past-time, not a strategy for reform. Criticism has its place, but it achieves little without the motivation to act.

My pride in and my respect for the members of Rainbow Labor is for many reasons: that you have been hardworking, that you have been heartfelt, that you have been principled, but, perhaps most of all, that you have been strategic. Instead of standing back and saying 'this is what should happen', you are making it happen.

And to our friends and partners outside of the Labor movement, I also thank you for your work. For understanding that the conditions for change need to be created, for

working with us, for the finding of common ground, and for respecting the different parts we play in the reform task.

Finally, why marriage equality?

I think we should be in fact asking the opposite – why not marriage equality?

Because equality is a bedrock principle. It is amongst humanity's most persistent of aspirations. It has moved millions to action across the span of history, and it is a principle fundamental to contemporary Australia.

It is a principle which we would never today contemplate breaching in respect of race or age or class, but a principle denied to some in the Australian community solely on the basis of their sexuality.

In this, it is clear, not all Australians are equal.

That is why change is needed. But it is change that should not be feared. I say to those who oppose marriage equality, there is nothing to fear.

Marriages between men and women are in no way devalued, nor made less secure by this change. It will not see fewer heterosexual couples marrying, nor will it make those marriages less likely to endure.

Equality does not diminish the worth of your relationships, it simply recognises the worth of ours.

Because this is a debate about our closest relationships. It is about the people we love. And when we are told these relationships are different, that they should be treated differently, we understand the truth of what is being said. And it can be hurtful.

But instead of flinching, we are motivated to act because we all know the worth of our relationships. That is why this campaign will continue and that is why change will come.

So, as we prepare for the debate next week and beyond, we should recognise how much we have done, but also how much we have yet to do.

Legislative change will not be achieved unless those who call themselves Liberals show themselves to be just that. The party of personal choice refuses to allow choice on this most personal of issues. This cannot go unchallenged.

At the outset I spoke of these being hard times for the progressive side of politics, but hard times come, and hard times go. They are never an excuse for submission and they are never withstood by meekness. It is the resilience bred in the hard times which enables renewal, and, by its very nature, progressive politics demands renewal.

A party of reform must both understand the present and look to the future, and our values, which are enduring, need to be applied to today's world.

Equality before the law has been a longstanding principle.

Equality before the law is a Labor principle.