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**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
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WORKPLACE RELATIONS ADVERTISING

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.15 p.m.)—Today's MPI, and the speeches we have just heard from Minister Hockey and the member for Indi, are indeed a sorry reflection on the priorities of this arrogant government. Pathetic and fluffy indeed! Throw in a few Freudian slips as well! But here we are adding up the cost of spin and deception instead of adding value to protecting and promoting genuine fairness in the workplace. While working people, after 12 months of Work Choices have paid dearly in cuts, cuts, cuts to their pays and conditions, this government just spends, spends, spends to protect its electoral fortunes.

Let us cast our minds back to 'Take 1' of the Work Choices saga 'Death of a Salesman', when Minister Andrews had the lead role. His initial contribution to the Work Choices sell was pulped when he forgot to put the word 'fair' in—\$152,000 of pulp fiction and another 5.8 million booklets stockpiled in warehouses around the country. Then followed that truly forgettable run of four-page newspaper advertisements, so full of text and so full of detail that it is doubtful anyone actually read them.

Then came 'Take 2' 'protected by law'—\$55 million worth of spin. That was \$55 million wasted because the Australian people learnt from the government's own sources that very little of their rights or working conditions were actually protected by law. All of the 11 so-called protected award conditions were ditched from 45 per cent of all Australian workplace agreements signed since Work Choices was introduced, 67.6 per cent of penalty rates were ditched, 75.4 per cent of shift loadings were ditched and 51.4 per cent of overtime was lost—and I could go on.

But the new minister, Minister Hockey, looked at the detail and discovered one very important fact about the new Work Choices law—people hate it. So now, with a big enough advertising spend, that rogue bear Minister Hockey will attempt some new packaging—some new spin—to convince the Australian people that Work Choices is fair. Well, we are going to pay dearly for 'Take 3': 'Houdini' Hockey's act of illusion, making Work Choices disappear from the minds and memories of Australians and magically conjuring up a fairness test on TV screens before our very eyes.

But while the government will bombard the airwaves of this nation there is a cone of silence, apparently, on how much the spin will cost. The Prime Minister told parliament yesterday, in relation to his plans for more taxpayer funded advertising, that there is nothing planned beyond this week but if there is the public will be informed: spin!

According to Senate estimates today that little bit of spin has cost \$4.1 million. That little bit of preplanning has cost \$25,000 an hour. It is a pre-election campaign advertising run worth thousands of votes, obviously, but we do not quite know how many millions of dollars. Responsible economic management is on the cutting room floor. As for a new fairness test, well, we have not seen it yet. That hasty \$4 million worth of ads rushed to air certainly did not tell us much about the test, but we do know it is coming! It is coming to a workplace near you just in time for the 2007 election campaign run-up ratings period.

They might not have all the lines right yet but they certainly know a lot about timing. However, I think the PM needs to take more acting lessons. The smirk on his face yesterday in question time was perhaps worth to us a thousand election ads later this year. 'It is not a PR campaign,' he said. Well, the 'PR campaign-not' that is costing at this rate up to \$20 million a month from the people's cash register looks like a PR election campaign to us. Minister Hockey, you can dress Work Choices up in multimillion dollar clothing and you can give it the new multimillion dollar makeover, and you can throw the fairness-out-the-backdoor blitz, but when the Australian people add up the costs they will know that this Work Choices package, under any other name, is just the biggest loser of all.