



Progressive Futures

Bill Shorten, Leader of the Australian Labor Party

For all of us, the true reward of politics is progress. Our parties and movements are motivated by neither the trappings of office nor the appearance of power, but the meaningful good that principled, energetic reforming governments can deliver.

Our mission is both enduring and evolving. As agents of change, we reject complacency. We are ever alert to the danger of entrenching disadvantage with a mere defense of the status quo. Yet at the same time, we accept and embrace responsibility for ensuring that the forces of change work for our citizens, not against them. We feel, acutely, a moral duty to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are not left behind by advancing technologies and evolving economies.

The means and methods by which we once sought to deliver social democracy have altered, but our foundational principles are unmoved. A century ago, we spoke primarily of the fair distribution of wealth; today, we embrace responsibility for its creation. We reject the false choice between a strong economy and a fair society because we understand that each is the precondition for the other.

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Understanding and advocating this partnership between economic advancement and social justice is essential for the success of modern progressive parties.

Our vision is for an economy and a society that rewards citizens for their ideas, encourages participation, and values the contribution individuals make to their communities. In the modern progressive economy, small business is supported and celebrated as the catalyst for national success and productivity and innovation are harnessed to drive broad-based, inclusive growth for the many, not trickle-down wealth for the few.

The aftermath of the global financial crisis has been witness to a growing legion of leaders from politics, private enterprise, academia, and the public sector recasting the relationship between growth and fairness.

The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Bank of England, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, organized labor, and the Vatican are all sending the same message: Inclusion drives growth.

This emerging global consensus offers us all a new opportunity. Cooperating and sharing ideas in global forums such as these helps us develop the best possible policy solutions. There is much we can learn from each other—and from our histories—as so many of the opportunities and obstacles we must navigate are international and universal.

The single most important foundation stone of our progress must be our integrity and our respect for democracy. Our parties must always uphold our covenant of trust with the people we represent. Earning and repaying the trust of our citizens is essential to building the community consensus upon which enduring reform depends, and it helps maintain

a broader faith in the democratic process, in the value of the political system, and in its ability to deliver meaningful, beneficial change.

Demonstrating the value of participation in politics requires us to continually renew and reform our parties' structures to harness community ideas. An emphasis on local knowledge shows an understanding of both our regions and our cities and helps us present the best possible candidates, especially women, as we support their onward march through the institutions of power.

The party I lead, the Australian Labor Party, has always believed in what Australians call the "fair go." A century ago, a fair go meant working with employers and employees to guarantee a decent day's wage for a day's work and basic workplace protections.

The fair go is also an economic reform, not just a social good. Decent pay and conditions help create more productive and more profitable enterprises, empowering consumers and growing our national wealth.

In the same way, affordable and accessible higher education helps deliver a smarter and more innovative nation—a Labor Party commitment to fairness that boosts our economy by improving the skills, knowledge, and flexibility of our workforce and equipping our people to adapt to economic change.

The same is true of health care. Forty years ago, the number-one cause of personal bankruptcy in Australia was medical expenses. For hundreds of thousands of Australians, sudden illness or injury meant poverty. The Labor Party built Medicare—a system of universal health care and a source of international competitive advantage. Medicare keeps our people healthy and productive at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer and at no cost to employers.

Thirty years ago, millions of Australians retired with nothing in the bank but their last paycheck. Too many of our people were working hard all their lives only to retire poor, relying solely on modest government fixed income to get by.

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The Labor Party, working with business and the union movement, created universal superannuation: a national savings pool that permanently relieves demand on pensions and other government support. Superannuation is a savings system that puts Australians in control of their retirement, guaranteeing them the dignity and security that they have most certainly earned.

A little more than seven years ago, I was sworn in as the parliamentary secretary for disabilities, and my eyes were opened to a whole new world of unfairness and neglect. Hundreds of thousands of Australians with disabilities were exiled to a second-class life in their own country, their elderly parents wracked by the sleepless midnight anxiety of worrying who would look after their child when they were gone.

The Labor Party created the National Disability Insurance Scheme, or NDIS—a system of tailored support and targeted resources that empowers Australians to fulfill their potential and plan their own futures. The NDIS is a reform that will boost job opportunities for Australians with disabilities and give their remarkable careers the chance to re-engage with the employment market.

For me, these reforms represent a political GPS for navigating the new challenges of the 21st century. They are indeed mighty challenges: two generations of retirees alive at the same time, a changing climate, a global market, and a borderless world.

There are also the sometimes-forgotten social problems of our time: a sense of isolation, loneliness, and a loss of community. For all the diverse new ways of communicating, growing numbers of people feel that help and friendship are beyond their grasp—we have to reach out to them.

No one nation, no leader has all the answers to these defining questions. But important forums such as the Center for American Progress' Global Progress initiative allow us to share the ideas upon which we will build the solutions. Together, I believe we can make change work for everyone who depends upon the politics of progress.

