



the

EGGLESTON

report

Senator Alan Eggleston: Working for Western Australia

April 2004

Medicare agreement reached

You will be aware by now that the Howard Government has agreed with the help of the four Independent senators to further improve MedicarePlus. What you may not know is that the Howard Government is now spending more on health care for Australians than any previous government in history.

The MedicarePlus safety net is an important structural improvement to the Medicare system to help people cope with the costs of out of hospital procedures (such as MRI, CT scans, ultrasound and specialist visits) which have never been widely bulk-billed.

The measures agreed to will see an extra \$427 million dollars invested in Medicare, bringing the total

MedicarePlus package to \$2.85 billion. The measures include lowering the safety net threshold, higher bulk billing incentives in rural and remote areas and a new MBS item for allied health, including some dental services.

The independent and minor party Senators will move an amendment to the MedicarePlus safety net legislation to reduce the annual threshold to \$300 for Commonwealth concession card holders and family tax beneficiaries and \$700 for others. The new safety net will be available to everyone and will benefit about 450,000 individuals and families in any one year. For people in the safety net, the rebate will be the standard rebate plus 80 per cent of any gap between the rebate

and the charged fee. The extended MedicarePlus safety net will cost an additional \$174 million to July 1, 2007. All Australians will now have peace of mind that they will be entitled to financial assistance for major out of hospital medical bills. The Howard Government has extended the MedicarePlus package even further to help more families and individuals facing high medical bills and regional and remote communities as well as people suffering chronic illness.

The Government will offer more opportunities for bulk billing by introducing a \$7.50 incentive payment for bulk-billed GP consultations with concession card holders and children under 16 in non-metropolitan areas and Tasmania. This increased bulk-billing incentive, targeted to areas where bulk-billing



rates are generally low, will replace the earlier \$5 incentive in these areas and will be payable from May 1.

The additional non-metropolitan bulk-billing incentive will cost \$131 million to July 1, 2007.

The Howard Government is making a huge -- and unprecedented -- investment in the health of Australians, and this will bring many benefits. The MedicarePlus package looks set to be exciting new chapter in our nation's healthcare. To learn more, visit www.medicare.gov.au

Kind regards

Alan Eggleston

Free trade agreement to benefit Australia

On February 8 2004 Trade Minister Mark Vaile concluded an agreed text for the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement quotas at an average yearly rate of 5 per cent. with US counterpart, Trade Representative Bob Zoellick. Negotiations for the agreement were announced in November 2002 and the first round of negotiations was held in Canberra from 17-21 March 2003. An FTA with the US presents a unique opportunity to advance the interests of Australia's exporters, and offers significant benefits to the nation in terms of growth and employment. I believe the agriculture deal will be warmly welcomed by our rural sector, with the agreement delivering substantial market access for the majority of



The increase — worth \$55 million in the first year of the Agreement, is across the board for all dairy products constrained by quotas, providing significant new market opportunities for dairy processors and producers. The agreement will also enable beef producers to supply an additional 15,000 tonnes of beef in year two, increasing to 70,000 tonnes in year 18, and then effectively free trade.

Additionally, tariffs on the majority of agricultural products, including most lamb and sheepmeat, and products such as oranges, cut flowers and cotton seeds, will be zero from day 1 of the agreement,

Australia's agricultural producers — including further tariff elimination will take place over the beef and dairy industries which have faced periods of 4,10 and 18 years. For details of the restrictive barriers in the US market. The Australia-US Free Trade Agreement, visit www.trademinister.com.au

Foreign Minister visits Western Australia



On a whirlwind trip to Western Australia, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer stopped off at South Perth. It was my pleasure to introduce the Minister, and hear him discuss Australia's foreign policy. Pictured left is Andres Timmerman, Andrew Murfin and myself with the Minister.

WA ROADS BENEFIT FROM FEDERAL BLACKSPOT PROGRAM

The Federal Government's Blackspot program has saved countless lives since its inception in 1996, fixing up known trouble spots on our roads, and it was my recent duty to hand over \$391,725

to two Hasluck local government bodies for black spot road safety improvements.

The Hasluck grants were announced as part of a \$5 million national program.

In congratulating the two councils set to gain from the projects, I acknowledged the co-operative effort between federal, state and local governments, in partnership with local communities, to reduce the national road toll. It is clear that much more needs to be done by all Australians

to reduce fatalities on our roads. I appreciate the community consultation process used to review these safety proposals.

Widespread consultation helps ensure local concerns are addressed. Youth, speed and alcohol are well known causes of road accidents, but an equally important factor is faults in roads

such as a turn that is too tight, a road shoulder which is too narrow or the need to widen a road. Often such faults are easily correctable at

a relatively low cost The WA panel, which reviews priorities for the program, includes representatives of the Royal Automobile Club of WA, Transport Forum WA and the

State and local governments.

The black spot program, now in its eighth year, continues to ensure work is carried out at some of the high casualty accident areas across the nation.

An evaluation indicated that it returned around \$14 in benefit for every \$1 invested and prevented at least 32 fatalities and more than 1500 serious injuries in its first three years. The

Government extended the program to 2006 at a cost of \$180 million. Information is available on line at <http://www.dotars.gov.au/>



Senator Alan Eggleston congratulates City of Gosnells mayor Pat Morris, council representatives and Stuart Henry

Green Corps at work in the community

“ I was fortunate to open the Green Corps project in Bennett Brook, near Guildford, recently. Green Corps offers young people an opportunity to volunteer to participate in significant environmental and cultural heritage projects. Each project involves 10 young people and a team leader for 26 weeks. Participants gain experience and personal development through accredited and on the project training while being involved in a number of activities. ”



State Government wrong to stamp out GM crops: Senator

The State Government's decision to declare Western Australia a GM-free zone is a hastily, ill-considered step which could disadvantage WA Farmers, according to Senator Alan Eggleston. I have long been a supporter of research into genetically modifying our crops and was surprised to learn the Government had become the first in Australia to close the doors to GM crops – causing confusion by itself as the gatekeeper.

This means it will be up to the State Government to decide which, if any, crops would be allowed to enter Western Australia. Genetically modifying our agricultural produce is the way of the future, with the potential to improve yields and eliminate diseases which have the potential to wreak havoc on our primary produce sector. Opponents to genetically modified agriculture are generally not well informed of its potential benefits. We have been using the principles of genetic modification for many hundreds of years, and the use of modern technology is no more than an extension of this natural process. Our farmers must remain competitive, and must look to GM crops as a means of achieving higher yielding, better quality produce. This decision has the potential to leave our farming sector significantly disadvantaged and I can only hope the crops that carry real potential for economic development in our primary industry sector get the consideration they deserve.

Australian books on show

West Australians are urged to support Books Alive 2004—an exciting initiative promoting the value of books, reading and literacy and the work of Australian writers.

Books Alive, which will run from 31 July –15 August 2004, is the biggest cooperative promotion of books and reading ever undertaken in Australia.

'The Federal Government is committed to supporting the book industry in Australia and recognises the significant role that books play in our cultural life. Books Alive is a

part of the Government's Book Industry Assistance Plan,' Senator Eggleston said.

'Books Alive will give residents in Western Australia an opportunity to buy one of six outstanding and popular Australian books for only \$5 when they purchase any other book over a two week period.'

The six books that will be promoted and sold

during Books Alive 2004 are:

- *Shiver* by Nikki Gemmell
- *White Gardenia* by Belinda Alexander
- *Selby the Wonder Dog* – containing two Selby favourites, *Selby Splits and Selby Surfs* by Duncan Ball
- *The Shark Net* by Robert Drewe
- *Blacktown* by Shane Weaver
- *Au Revoir* by Mary Moody



Also, an exclusive specially branded Books Alive 'buy one get one free' package available at

discount department stores will include a brand new title, **Spiking the Girl** by Gabrielle Lord.

'I encourage everyone in Western Australia to support Australian authors and the Australian publishing industry by getting behind the Books Alive campaign in August 2004.'

For more information on Books Alive visit www.booksalive.com.au