

## Turnbull will acknowledge people's pain in speech on agenda

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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In an address being billed as optimistic but realistic, Malcolm Turnbull on Wednesday will acknowledge that despite long-sustained economic growth, in many parts of Australia “times are not so good”.

In these areas jobs are scarce and prospects less promising than they were, he will say.

With [Tuesday's Essential poll](#) showing the Coalition trailing Labor 46-54% and One Nation's 10% primary vote reflecting a populist backlash, Turnbull faces a formidable political task when he outlines his agenda for 2017 at the National Press Club.

He will also be under some pressure on how his government, which has so far adopted a softly, softly approach, plans to handle the unfolding Trump challenge.

Turnbull will make a fresh pitch for the government's embattled proposal to cut company tax. With the tax legislation set to be a key item after parliament resumes next week, Turnbull will say that if Australia had a 25% business tax rate today, “full-time workers on average weekly earnings would have an extra A\$750 in their pockets each and every year”.

The initiative, from last year's budget, would progressively reduce company tax to 25% over a decade, with the biggest businesses getting their cuts last. But on present numbers the government will only be able to get company tax relief for smaller businesses through the Senate.

Turnbull will strike a hopeful note about the prospect of passage of proposed childcare reforms and their accompanying savings, saying discussions with the Senate crossbench have been “constructive”.

Turnbull will focus on the major issues that separate the government and opposition under the theme of “opportunity and security”, according to speech extracts released ahead of time.

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This includes opportunities to get a “world-class education”, to get a job, and to start a business. “Security” ranges from job and economic security, through to energy security and national security.

Turnbull will strongly reject criticism from Labor and others that the government is refusing to spend enough on schools, saying record amounts are being invested, and posing the question: “How can it be that funding is increasing but results are going backwards?”

Reflecting the concern about recent international comparisons showing Australian children’s mediocre performance, Turnbull will say: “Our focus must be, at all times, on improving outcomes. This includes implementing measures to improve teacher quality. This year we will be seeking a new deal with the states that ensures the massive investment of governments and parents deliver better results that our children deserve.”

Hyping up an issue the government pushed hard late last year, Turnbull will declare that: “Energy will be a defining debate in this parliament. We’re determined to help families and businesses by making electricity affordable and reliable; Labor’s policies mean higher power prices and energy insecurity.”

The Coalition has denounced Labor’s ambitious commitments on renewable energy. But Turnbull is sticking with the government’s own renewable energy target, this week rejecting a call from former prime minister Tony Abbott to revisit it.

Turnbull will continue his pitch for freer trade, under threat from Donald Trump and rising protectionist forces more generally. On this issue he has been willing to disagree publicly with the new US administration.

“Whatever other countries may think, it is very clear that for Australia, more trade means more exports, which means more jobs and more opportunity,” he will say. “Those who oppose our export deals are really calling for less opportunity, diminished prosperity and fewer jobs.”

He will say that although disappointed by the US’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific

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Partnership, “we continue to work to open more markets for our exports with negotiations underway with India, Indonesia, the EU and in due course the United Kingdom”.

At the Press Club on Tuesday Bill Shorten attacked Turnbull for declining to criticise Trump over his immigration crackdown.

“I absolutely support the American alliance, but let’s be clear, sometimes there are issues where if the nation’s leader is silent, it can be interpreted as agreement,” Shorten said. “I will not remain silent therefore. If the Germans can speak up, if the English can speak up, if the Canadians can speak up, then why are we silent?”

But Turnbull, speaking earlier after the White House gave an assurance that Australian dual citizens would be exempt from Trump’s temporary ban on the entry of people from seven countries that are predominantly Muslim, made it clear he thought it was not in Australia’s interest to have a public stoush with Trump on immigration. “My job is to get results for Australians and that’s what I have done today.”

*Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.*

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