

O'Dwyer to business: 'step up' to help the unemployed

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The Minister for Jobs and Industrial Relations, Kelly O'Dwyer, will today tell businesses they need to do more to assist the unemployed into jobs.

She will also warn employment providers against simply "churning" the jobless, as well as urging the long-term unemployed to make maximum effort to prepare themselves for work.

In an address to a business leaders summit, released ahead of delivery, O'Dwyer says a three-point approach is required to get better results for those out of work.

Long-term unemployed people need to participate in programs to acquire the necessary skills, education or experience. "They have to turn up, and they need to keep fronting up", she says. "The unemployed have to take personal responsibility and take opportunities wherever they present themselves."

Secondly, there must be "very active support, planning and back up from government, especially for people who are at the margin".

"Through our employment providers, we need to help people to overcome fear of change, fear of losing their security of benefits, or help with housing insecurity and unstable personal circumstances.

"We need to find out what each individual's barriers are and give them the support they need to break through those barriers. We should not underestimate or dismiss these barriers," she says.

"As a government, we also have to make sure our employment providers are not simply churning the long-term unemployed through employment programs, but are actually focusing on the outcome. They need to help their clients get a job and keep it."

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O'Dwyer's message to employers is that "industry and businesses need to step up and give the unemployed a go".

She says industry, desiring skilled and "job ready" workers, "want the education and training system to do all the prepping for them.

"But industry needs to accept more social responsibility and partner with the community to invest in the low-skilled and untrained workers and individuals who haven't worked in a long time if ever, but who will, in time, become productive and valuable workers."

O'Dwyer points out that the government is providing significant subsidies of up to \$10,000 to employers to take on unemployed people.

A new feature being added to the Job Outlook website – called the Explore Australia tool - will help people looking for work to find out what skills are in demand where they live, or elsewhere.

O'Dwyer says the government sees industrial relations, now elevated into cabinet in Scott Morrison's reshuffle, as "closely related to its fundamental commitment to fairness".

"The workplace relations regulatory framework must ensure it achieves the basic test of fairness. And when I say fairness – I mean fairness for all," she says.

She condemns as unfair the unions' just-concluded "extraordinary sweetheart deal with the Victorian government for the Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel".

This "will result in workers being paid \$150,000 a year, including bumping up site allowances of \$25,000 a year."

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O'Dwyer says the people of Victoria pay for such deals in higher toll charges and taxes, and if more is spent on one project there is less money available for others.

“That’s why these sweetheart deals are not fair.”

“Similarly, when the Coalition government objects to the flagrant lawlessness on construction sites, it is not just because it is wrong to disregard court orders and Fair Work Commission rulings - it is also because the cost of this law-breaking is borne by the community.”

O'Dwyer reaffirms that the government is determined to try to get its Ensuring Integrity Bill through the Senate.

This bill would make it easier to act against the construction section of the CFMEU.

But crossbencher Tim Storer said in a statement he was not inclined to support the bill, outlining various objections.

“The bill seeks to adapt the Corporations Act to align penalties against union officials with those for company directors as well as to introduce new measures in relation to union mergers”, Storer said.

But the legislation went far beyond the penalties and provisions of the Corporations Act, he said.

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 their academic appointment.

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