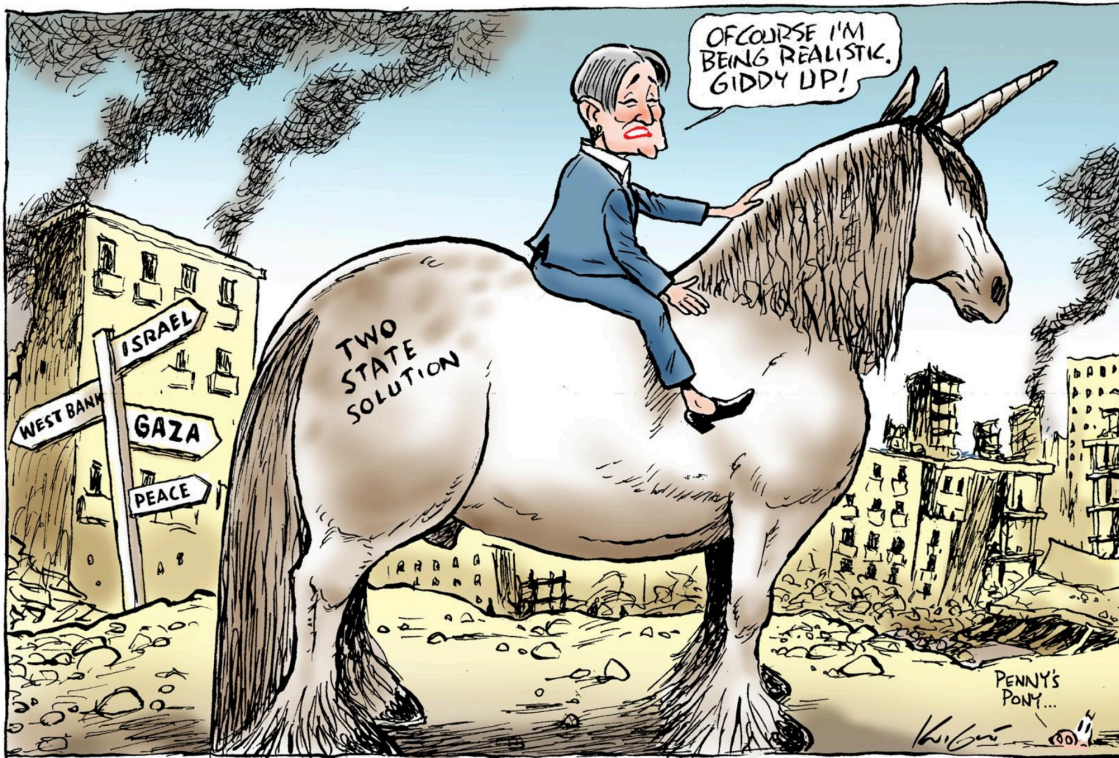


Mark Knight



Goldfish leave adds to costs

John Lloyd



Commonwealth Bank employees can access two days' paid leave if their pet dog, cat, horse or even goldfish becomes indisposed or dies. Victoria's public servants will soon be able to access five days paid leave for period or reproductive health, as reported in the Herald Sun on Tuesday. Australia by any measure has generous leave and conditions of employment. But as the cost of doing business rises, and productivity drops, large private and government employers may find delving too far into wellbeing leave has adverse consequences.

Employer responsibilities for staff welfare have traditionally involved providing a safe and healthy workplace, and standard leave entitlements such as annual, sick, long service, bereavement and parental leave, while workers' compensation protects those injured at work. The underlying principles are that employees work conscientiously in a safe workplace. Personal health and wellbeing are private matters.

Some employers, particularly large and government employers, are now moving beyond these principles. They are agreeing to entitlements that address their employees' private wellbeing.

The Commonwealth Bank Enterprise Agreement 2023 is instructive. The agreement offers employees several types of paid wellbeing leave, including two days of pet leave, one week of "life leave", and 12 months of gender affirmation leave (with eight weeks paid).

The Victorian Public Service Agreement offers 27 types of leave, including 12 months of unpaid grandparent leave.

The attention to an employee's personal wellbeing extends beyond the provisions contained in enterprise agreements.

Public servants in Queensland were offered five days' paid leave for psychological distress after the Voice to Parliament referendum failed. At PwC, employees receive \$295 per annum "to spend on items or activities that support your wellness". Employees may increasingly focus on their personal circumstances rather than their work obligations.

Bosses have a right to introduce operational changes to improve efficiency, but these changes could be challenged more frequently if they are seen to be disturbing employees' personal wellbeing.

Small and medium-sized businesses will be unable to afford most of these indulgences. **John Lloyd is Senior Research Fellow at the H.R. Nicholls Society and was the Australian Public Service Commissioner from 2014-18.**

High immigration creates a perfect economic storm

The Albanese government's record immigration intake is proving to be hugely unpopular with most Australians, according to the latest data released this week by The Australian Population Research Institute (TAPRI).

Seventy-one per cent of voters say we do not need more people, with one in two wanting "drastic" cuts to immigration levels.

If we had a referendum on the Big Australia strategy, it would make the failed Voice look popular.

Net migration added around 550,000 to the population last year, adding pressure on housing, hospitals, roads and other vital resources and infrastructure. The population surge coincided with Australia recording its lowest housing approval rate in 12 years.

It's a perfect storm of ineptitude and poor planning. And the records don't stop there. According to the government's own data, there are more than 713,000 international students in Australia, breaking last year's record number of 664,178, and adding to the record-high 2.8 million temporary entrants in the country.

TAPRI's national survey also revealed that more than 70 per cent of Australians believe that the increasing population is helping push up housing prices – the rest presumably failed Economics 101. It would be one thing if the boost in

Rita Panahi



numbers corresponded with the cutting of red, green and black tape that is holding back development, and pushing up the cost of projects that make it through the bureaucratic quagmire, but the opposite is true.

Other revelations from TAPRI's data include that one in two Australians see themselves as financially insecure, or just barely surviving financially, and only 14 per cent say they are living comfortably.

Also concerning is the number of young Australians who lack connection to their homeland.

The self-loathing, anti-Australia and anti-Western civilisation sentiment that has for decades been fed to kids, from kinder to university, is having a profound impact. While older Australians expressed a deep connection with Australia, with 77 per cent of 60 to 74-year-olds saying they felt to "a great extent" a sense of belonging to the country, that number plummeted to just 32 per cent for 18 to 29-year-olds.

It should trouble any responsible government that two in three under 30s don't feel that connection, allegiance or sense of pride in their own country.

It's not hard to understand why when even the leadership of this country seems to be ashamed of our national day and insists on appearing in front of three flags, not just the one that represents us all.

SPOT THE GENUINE SCANDAL

Just how much longer can the football world minimise a genuine drug scandal – likened by the founding president of the World Anti-Doping Agency, Dick Pound, to that of the Soviets and East Germans in the 70s and 80s – yet whip up hysteria about a homophobic slur?

Port Adelaide's Jeremy Finlayson has copped a barrage of invective from the footy media after making an ugly homophobic comment against an Essendon player.

Despite his admission, contrition and apology, he has copped a hefty three-week suspension, but even that

is not enough to satisfy the activists whom the AFL and its clubs pander to incessantly.

LGBTQIA activist Angie Greene wanted a six-week ban, likening the slur, "f---t", to the n-word. "Sadly, I think the punishment is super predictable in the way it reflects how the AFL and society in general treat casual homophobia," she said.

If the AFL, the activists and the football media were serious about taking a stand against genuine homophobia and systematic oppression, they would demand that the Sydney Swans cut ties with their official airline partner, Qatar Airways, the state-owned airline of a country where homosexuality is a crime punishable by jail, beatings and in some cases death.

That would actually mean something.

But it's easier to pile on a player who in the heat of the game made a stupid mistake, apologised for it, but has not been spared days of abuse, including from those who pretend to care about the welfare and mental health of players.

It says something about the absurd priorities and "integrity" standards of the AFL that Finlayson's offence is considered far more grievous than a player who breaks the law by obtaining and using a banned substance, then dodges the WADA code by pre-testing and faking injury.

More than 70 per cent of us believe the increasing population is helping push up housing prices