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NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH ALLIANCE INC

PUBLIC SEMINAR: HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN REMOTE AUSTRALIA,

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MATILDA HOUSE:

WELCOME TO COUNTRY:

Facilitator: Sue McAlpin

SUE McALPIN: I'd now like to call on Matilda House for a Welcome to Country.

MATILDA HOUSE: If you are all sitting there and bit of fresh air came through the place about 15 minutes ago, that was Senator Barnaby Joyce. Thank you so much, it was fantastic. I'll stand here because no one can see me behind that. Born short and I'll die short. But anyway I want to die a healthy person and as an elder of this beautiful country of my ancestors, I'd like to welcome each and every one of you here. And I'd like to show you the respect that you in turn will show us the respect in our country.

But most of all I would like to say to you that what Senator Barnaby Joyce was talking about is something that does affect each and every one of us - and I listened to your speech, I thought you were great. You haven't converted me over to the argy-bargy but I'll do something about some others. But I'd just like to say through that I'd like to see the health of the indigenous people of Australia, you know, to be much better than what it is today. And, of course, when you're talking about doctors coming from other countries and leaving others, well, that's what's happening here in Australia. It's exactly what's happening.



People who live out in the bush, people who live on their traditional lands, they don't have that economy to say, "Oh, I'm going to march down to the doctor and see what's wrong with me." They can't do it, because everybody is coming to the cities to work. Aboriginal people have been fighting, you know, and wanting to survive for over two hundred and so many years. But we can't do that if people are going to do, you know, the big "I'm going to desert you all". So I'm on the other foot, Mr Joyce. That's like a song, isn't it?

But that's what it is. I'm on the other foot now of what's happening all over the world and bringing doctors. That's what's happening here in Australia. You know, how many people - all the hands that you've got here today and those fingers, still does not represent the very few people of nurses and health care centres for Aboriginal and medical service for Aboriginal people throughout Australia. So you are the people that day in and day out you live in those remote communities, you work in them and you are battling and you are struggling.

Do what the Senator says, march up there - look, and for a start you've got to get through - because of everything that's happened, you've still got to get through security. And let me tell you about security up there, you know, you go in and people want to be there to do their things with their Senators, but, and like you said I've travelled down those roads for 40 years, getting in to talk to Senators, lobbying, having someone there, an advocator, and doing all those things. As Aboriginal people we've done that time and time and time again. But still we still have the same problems.

The people of this country, the original inhabitants, are still battling and struggling, out there in the remote areas where doctors just find it a little bit hard to go out there to work, you know. So that's what it's all about, is what Senator Barnaby Joyce has spoken about today. And it really touched my heart to know that you spoke like that. I've never heard anyone from the National Party speak before. I have on TV with lots of other people from years ago when you were just a small boy. But, you know, lots of sense comes out of the things that you've spoken about and I much appreciate it. I'm a mother of four children. I'm also a grandmother of 14 and great-grandmother of one.



This beautiful country which we call - you all know it as Ngunnawal, but that's the linguistic word. That's the language that was spoken around the parts of the area when you've come into this country. Here it's Ngambra and Ngambra is that piece of water out there that lying - underneath it is probably the loveliest river you could ever see. And it's called the Munungla [ph]. So under that river is all our life, is where we lived for years. And as a young girl I travelled up and down it. And there's lots of other people here in this beautiful Nation's Capital of - you know, not indigenous people too that know all about that river underneath.

It's sad what Americans can do, isn't it? They come out and they even change the face of the river, you know, isn't it? They did, they changed the face of this country by directing a river, with putting a lake over it. And it's all part of our health and wellbeing, because we know what's there, and that's what's kept us healthy. And that's what has kept us being who we are, because of our identity. It's a river, magnificent. And you are all here today celebrating what is to be part of this whole nation, and that's the health and wellbeing of the whole communities right through Australia.

Thank you very much and thank you for having me here, the protocols, and I appreciate it and on behalf of the ancestors and the elders I thank you so much for having me.
