

'I hope there is an Indigenous PM'



MARTIN OLLMAN/NCA NEWSWIRE

AIEF scholarship students Reuben Simpson (Queensland) and Aroha Parkinson (Northern Territory) meet Anthony Albanese on Monday



New work-for-dole scheme launched for remote communities

The Albanese government will put remote Aboriginal communities and organisations in control of a revamped work-for-the-dole scheme billed as real jobs, providing Indigenous workers with long-service leave and superannuation for the first time in the 37-year history of the scheme.

Indigenous Australians Minister Linda Burney will on Tuesday announce the new remote jobs scheme, initially for 3000 people, as the first step towards fully replacing the failed Community Development Program. It had about 40,000 participants but has been largely moribund since it was acknowledged as unworkable by both sides of politics.

In the new remote jobs scheme, local and community

organisations will employ Indigenous people in regions of high unemployment.

The new program is designed to help build the remote workforce and reduce the reliance on fly-in-fly-out workers. For example, when homes are repaired in remote Aboriginal communities the work is invariably done by contractors who fly in or charge \$2 per kilometre to drive vast distances to and from the job.

Ms Burney describes the new scheme as grounded in self-determination because it will let communities decide what jobs are created – such as community services and the care sector, hospitality and tourism, horticulture and retail.

"For too long, people in remote communities have missed out on economic opportunities and have been stuck in cycles of poverty," Ms Burney said.

"People in remote

communities should have access to the benefits and dignity of work – for themselves, their families and the next generation. This is about putting communities in the driver's seat to create local jobs and businesses.

"Rates of unemployment in remote communities are unacceptable and this is the first step in turning that around."

The CDP was successfully challenged by the traditional owners of the Ngaanyatjarra lands, who took the Morrison government to court claiming it was discriminatory.

From 2015, the CDP funded service providers in capital cities to administer a work-for-the-dole program in very remote locations, which caused problems.

On the Ngaanyatjarra lands, near the border of the NT and Western Australia, Indigenous workers on CDP were regularly "breached" meaning their

payments were docked or ceased for weeks at a time. This was often because they failed to meet reporting obligations that required them to have a mobile phone, regular access to the internet and to be proficient in English. Few participants had any of these.

About 350 Indigenous adults on the lands sued the former Coalition government and the case ended in an agreement that the program would be overhauled.

Ms Burney will provide details of the new remote jobs program when she presents the government's annual report on the Closing the Gap national agreement to parliament on Tuesday. The agreement is a commitment to reduce the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in 17 areas by 2031. Australia is on track to meet only four of the 17 targets.

PAUL GARVEY

EXCLUSIVE

SARAH ISON

Aroha Parkinson has left the Top End just once in her life, but this doesn't stop the 15-year-old from Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory from looking into the eyes of the Prime Minister and telling him that one day she intends to walk the halls of parliament.

"We haven't had an Indigenous voice at the top," said Aroha, the winner of the "If I was Prime Minister" competition. "And I want to be that voice."

Her fellow competition winner, 15-year-old Queenslander Reuben Simpson, has dreams of being a fighter pilot and one day working for NASA.

Seated in the Prime Minister's office and joined by Indigenous Australians Minister Linda Burney, Reuben and Aroha are told by both Labor leaders to "keep hold of those dreams".

Mr Albanese joked with Reuben that he might not be able to give him much advice on his chosen career path "unless playing Space Invaders" counted as relevant experience.

The "If I was Prime Minister"

competition has been running since 2013 and launched in response to a Newspoll survey that found two-thirds of Australians didn't believe they would see an Indigenous prime minister in their lifetime.

Both Reuben's and Aroha's essays on what they would do if they became prime minister focused on the homelessness epidemic in their respective com-

munities and the housing crisis that was exasperated by soaring cost-of-living pressures.

"Homelessness is a really big issue in Cairns. I see so many people just on the streets even when I'm going to school, or just like walking down to Central's and more should be done," Aroha said.

Reuben said "everything is connected together", from youth

crime, to domestic violence and homelessness and that an effective solution needed to address all the issues at once. This would be achieved only "by listening to the people", he said.

Despite being told by Ms Burney about the hours of a parliamentarian and "foregoing your privacy", Aroha was not deterred. "I'm very aware that if someone like me wanted to be prime minis-

ter, obviously, as a woman and a First Nation person, it's going to be hard. But yeah, I'm still going to try," she said.

Both winners said they believed an Indigenous prime minister would make a significant difference in addressing the challenges facing Aboriginal communities. "We've just never had a face for Australia that is Indigenous," Aroha said.