

# Julia Gillard on ABC Radio

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[Julia Gillard](#)

**ISSUES: Prince William; Republic; My School website; Education Revolution; Victorian College of the Arts; Nitin Garg; Youth Allowance.**

**JON FAINE:** Good Morning to you, happy New Year to you, Julia Gillard.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Happy new year to you, Jon.

**JON FAINE:** Are you charmed by Prince Charming too?

**JULIA GILLARD:** I didn't see Prince Charming but I think the Australian public have been charmed by him, so that's nice.

**JON FAINE:** Has he put the republic well and truly off the Government's agenda for now?

**JULIA GILLARD:** We didn't have any plans on the republic. The Prime Minister had already made that clear so that's not associated with Prince William's visit, but obviously it all came back into the news because of the visit.

**JON FAINE:** But it's Labor Party policy and somewhere at some time Kevin Rudd has said he would address the republic issue. Does the popularity of a visit by Prince Charming, as we're calling him, make this electorally unpalatable?

**JULIA GILLARD:** We have said over time, I think it's basically inevitable at some point that this nation is going to become a republic; in terms of a new referendum, new national debate, having people go in to vote and make a decision. We've been clear we haven't got any immediate plans to do that. I think the community continues to think about it and cast around for ideas on the republic. I don't believe as yet that there is a national consensus around the model, and that national consensus would really need to emerge, before you could contemplate a successful referendum.

Now in the people's minds, when they're thinking about these things, maybe the popularity of an individual royal family bears on their mind, I can't get in the heads of more than 20 million Australians, Jon, that might affect some people's decisions, but in terms of the Government's decision, it's not affected our decision. We're making the same point we've been making for a long period of time: our focus now is on the important things for Australian families and education in my area, nothing more important than that.

**JON FAINE:** Which we'll come to, but just the final question on this topic; you're looking for points of difference with Tony Abbott leading a revived, resuscitated Liberal Party Opposition, he is one of them.

Tony Abbott will be a staunch monarchist we all know that.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Jon, I don't think we've got to go out of our way to find points of difference with Tony Abbott's Liberal Party – Work Choices, investing in education, the future of the health system, climate change action verses climate change denial, there are many points of difference.

**JON FAINE:** Higher on the list than the republic?

**JULIA GILLARD:** We haven't changed the priority we've put on the republic and our priority remains on getting in place those policies that make a difference for Australian families.

**JON FAINE:** The teacher unions are saying that they will fight you tooth and nail over league tables, are you rethinking your policy?

**JULIA GILLARD:** No, I'm determined to deliver the school transparency that we've promised. Jon, this isn't a league table. A league table lists in a top to bottom, you know, best team in the AFL, worst performing team in the AFL, that's a league table. What this My School Website is; is it's a website where you can get in and get comprehensive performance information about individual schools, including their results in national testing, retention to year 12, trades pathways, numbers of teachers, numbers of kids, attendance rates, the socioeconomic status of the school and then when you've got all that information about your local school, you can then compare your local school with schools right around the country that serves similar sorts of kids.

It's not a league table, its very, very rich performance information, more information then parents in this country have ever had before, more information then the nation's ever had before. As a Federal Minister for Education, what it means is we can see relative levels of disadvantage right throughout the schooling system.

**JON FAINE:** You can see that already without publishing a league table, or a website. You've got all that data internally. if you want to use it – you've got it.

**JULIA GILLARD:** No, that is not true, Jon, I didn't have that data internally. When I became Minister for Education, there was no data set available to the Commonwealth that compared levels of disadvantage in schools for all schools. We had information about non-government schools, but not about government schools.

**JON FAINE:** Even if you've shuffled the information, now you've got it why do you have to make it public, which sets up battles between teachers and parents?

**JULIA GILLARD:** Well can I just go through that in order. Point number one; having that information itself can profoundly transform the future of Australian education because we are investing new money and implementing new reforms to combat disadvantage. I mean imagine...

**JON FAINE:** You can use it to reinvigorate policy.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Imagine a national government not being able to list and look at schools that are disadvantaged we couldn't do that.

**JON FAINE:** That's an obvious argument, but why make it public and setting up confrontation between parents with high expectations and teachers struggling to provide?

**JULIA GILLARD:** Well I don't believe we're setting up confrontation. I think we are empowering

parents.

But the question here, Jon, because we're comparing similar schools, you've got schools that are serving similar students. What's going to be transparent – and I believe should be transparent for Australia's parents and the Australian nation – is with similar kids, if one school's going streets ahead, there's best practise there to be shared; if one school's falling behind, then we need to lift that up and we've got the new money and new reforms to do that.

It will empower parents to go to their local school and say, look I've had a look at this, we're going well in reading, not so well in numeracy – what are we going to do to work on that, and what are we going to do to lift our numeracy standards? I see similar schools do better in numeracy than us, what can we learn from them?

It will empower parents to have that conversation. I believe parents are hungry for information they want to drive through to improve their kids' education and teachers and principals want to do that too. There's no confrontation in that; it's common purpose and new information.

**JON FAINE:** You've got the likelihood, as we've seen with hospital statistics, we can go through every area of government service, you'll just end up with teachers, or principals more likely, in particular those on incentives packages, that are fiddling the statistics to make themselves and their schools look good, and others who play it straight will get pummelled by the department and parents for reasons that may be well and entirely outside of their control.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Jon, not one part of this agenda is about pummelling, to use your words, it's not about naming and shaming; it's about helping people, giving them a helping hand, lifting them up with new money and new reforms to make a difference.

And, Jon, can I say this to you, and I think it's a very important point, I understand that it can be anxiety-causing for a parent to find out that their child is in an underperforming school. What's worse is your child being in an underperforming school and you never know that and no one ever does anything about it. We are determined to do something about it, and that's what the Education Revolution is about and that's why we've almost doubled the amount of money the national government puts into school education.

**JON FAINE:** 17 minutes to 10. Julia Gillard's offered to take some calls and I better get to them otherwise I'll keep banging on and I won't have any time for your calls.

Jordy from Southbank is first up. Good morning, Jordy.

**JORDY:** Good morning. I'm putting a question to the Deputy Prime Minister – why won't the Federal Government step in and save Australia's premier practical arts college, the Victorian College of the Arts?

**JULIA GILLARD:** The Victorian College of the Arts as you know is part of Melbourne University. We do fund the Victorian College of the Arts through our support for the student places in the Victorian College of the Arts. I know that there is a review in progress that was initiated by the state government about funding and models for the college. So we are supporting the college as through supporting the student places.

**CALLER 1:** Well Julia, it would be great if the Victorian College of the Arts was funded federally like NIDA is. NIDA does support drama and production sides, but the Victorian College of the Arts actually does all spectrums of the art world, we've got art, film and television, music, production, dance and

drama. So you know it has six schools within it and Melbourne University, who is obviously not focussed on practical education due to the Melbourne model, has stepped in and there's a threat here for Australia's arts culture, that we're going to lose things like puppetry which we lost this year, music theatre which we lost this year. It really is, for a person like me who is a developing artist in this world, it's an absolute shame that Australia is not investing money in the Arts like we're investing in sport and that sort of thing, Its really, I'm really desperately, I'm extremely upset by the closure of the college and I think the only way to save...

**JON FAINE:** Hold on the college hasn't closed, Jordy.

**CALLER 1:** Well, the signs gone out the front, Jon, it's now the Southbank Campus for the University of Melbourne.

**JON FAINE:** Some courses have been discontinued but I don't want you to exaggerate, care as we do about the VCA. Let's find out how much Julia Gillard cares about the VCA. Subject to this review, are you prepared if necessary to directly fund the VCA, if there's no other way of keeping that standing by?

**JULIA GILLARD:** I admire Jordy's passion and he obviously is passionate about the VCA and that's fantastic. Jon, I'm not coming here to make a funding commitment and I'm not going to do so. We support the VCA through supporting student places. It hasn't been direct funded out of the Arts portfolio the way some other places ar

**JON FAINE:** WAAPA in Perth is, NIDA in Sydney is. VCA's been an anomaly, and suddenly it's vulnerable.

**JULIA GILLARD:** We are continuing to support the student places, it's gone into the University of Melbourne. I know Jordy's critical of the performance of the University of Melbourne, but I think the University of Melbourne is doing its best to manage the VCA becoming part of what the university does, and we have significantly increased resources to universities through the Bradley reforms, a more than \$5 billion dollar package in the last Budget.

**JON FAINE:** You will be hearing a lot about the VCA during the course of this election year and they will undoubtedly, the activists who have been passionate, like Jordy so far, will continue to let you know.

But let's move on. Harry from Berwick – good morning, Harry.

**HARRY:** Good morning, Jon. I'd like to propose a question to Minister Gillard. Just with regards to that unfortunate incident that took place a few weeks ago that resulted in the death of the Indian student, Nitin Garg. What concerned me Is that the Victorian police, without completing its investigation, concluded that it wasn't racially motivated. What surprised me even further is that a few hours later, Julia Gillard was on record saying that it wasn't racially motivated. I'm interested now on what basis did they arrive at that conclusion when the investigation had not been completed.

**JON FAINE:** Fair question, Julia Gillard.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Look that is a fair question. I'm not a police officer and I don't do the investigation, so in terms of what I say publicly, I obviously take advice from the Victorian Police and we took advice from them on that day.

This was a tragic, tragic incident. The investigation is still in progress. We are absolutely I think, as Australians, we despise these kinds of incidents, this kind of violence. We've got to let the police do their work. What we can do as a nation is we can better support international students, and particularly

Indian students who come to this country. That's about a set of things the Government can do and we are doing those things to support students, but it's also about things the community can do to make students welcome.

**HARRY:** Minister, while I appreciate what you're saying, what intrigues me is that you, yourself have not allowed the police to complete their investigation, without pronouncing that it was not racially motivated. Now one gets the distinct impression that your primary concern is about safeguarding the education industry from India and China and other places, rather than seeing that justice is done.

**JULIA GILLARD:** That's really not a fair conclusion. On that day what I did was I repeated the things that were being said by the Victoria Police. They are obviously the expert advisers when it comes to police investigations. I'm not a police officer, I'm not going to pretend to be one. I'm not running the investigation, I didn't attend to the incident. I took the advice and used the same words as the people who do that very expert and professional job.

My passion here is of course to see justice done in this incident. My passion here is to make sure our suburbs and streets are safe. I live in Melbourne's West and a number of these incidents have been close to where I live and close to where I work in my federal electorate. I want people to be able to go to the Werribee train station and come home at night and feel safe, to take one example.

And of course, my passion here is that international students who come to this country, there's almost half a million of them every year, have a great experience when they're here.

**JON FAINE:** Have we got a problem with race?

**JULIA GILLARD:** Like every big society, Jon, we have some people in our society who have got a problem with race. Overwhelmingly as a country I think we are a tolerant, successful, welcoming, multicultural society.

**JON FAINE:** Are we changing? Is it emerging as an issue for us at a much greater scale than ever before? Yes, it's been there, but it's been almost trivial in the past.

**JULIA GILLARD:** I think within any society over time there's always been people who have been motivated by racial prejudice...

**JON FAINE:** Are there more now?

**JULIA GILLARD:** How could I answer that question, Jon?

**JON FAINE:** Well there are more incidents.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Well the police give us the crime statistics and all of that, and there's a science in all of that and they would say in terms of the crime statistics that we're not seeing a greater percentage of crime incidents involving people from, for example, Indian backgrounds, but I'll let the police go through all of that statistical work.

Jon, I can't know what's in people's minds and people's hearts when they see and Indian person or an Indigenous Australian or a Jewish Australian. I can't know what's in their minds or their hearts. But I do, as a member of this society, have a view about the nation overall, and my view about the nation overall is we have been a tremendously successful, tolerant, multicultural country. Are there some people who are motivated by racial prejudices? The answer to that is yes, and it would be yes for any nation around the world.

**JON FAINE:** Is that a growing number of people?

**JULIA GILLARD:** Jon, how can I tell? How do you suggest I look into the hearts of 21 million people and try and assess whether more are motivated by prejudices about race today than were five years ago?

**JON FAINE:** Well it's hard to know whether there's more things being reported, or the media are quicker to jump to conclusions, or whether there actually is a measurable increase in the number of incidents, violence, motivated on racial grounds. Likewise with the tennis, yes we've had incidents at the tennis time and time again, we've had incidents at soccer games time and time again, but you just start to wonder if there's enough of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle coming together to start to draw conclusions. Retired General Cosgrove was doing this in his Australia Day address.

**JULIA GILLARD:** And I agree with his conclusions and I think this morning I've essentially said the same thing as he said.

Jon, I think the best way of drawing conclusions is off the evidence and information. The Victoria Police are one body that's got some evidence and information because they obviously record crime statistics and we've to make sure that we know as much about that as we can. In terms of incidents at the tennis and things like that, I'm not sure that we can say there is a measurable difference. We've had incidents at soccer in the past; we've had the Cronulla riots a while back. So can we say that it's worse now than it was two or three years ago? I don't think we can draw that conclusion on the evidence that's available to us now.

**JON FAINE:** Let's move on to another question from Bernadette and Kate Patterson. You're through to Julia Gillard, good morning.

**BERNADETTE:** Good Morning, Deputy Prime Minister I'm ringing on behalf of country students who want to undertake tertiary studies in Melbourne. Look, it seems to me there is a real discrepancy between if you're living at home and living with your parents and you choose to stay, then that's a lot easier than kids who have no choice but leaving home. And faced with costs of renting in Melbourne and bigger areas, it just seems it's pretty much impossible for a lot of the students to undertake this. I'm just wondering what the Federal Government intends to do to maybe help that situation.

**JULIA GILLARD:** I am trying to help that situation; I'm trying to get through the Parliament a change to student income support which would make it fairer.

What we've got are the moment as a student income support system is one where the participation rates of kids from regional Australia in universities has gone backwards, and at the same time we've got evidence that there are kids living at home in the city in families that earn more than \$200,000 or \$300,000 a year that get full income support. I'm trying to fix that, and it's Tony Abbott, Mr Pyne and his Liberal Party that won't let me do it. So if you'd like to get on the phone and tell them to push the legislation through I'd be very grateful.

**BERNADETTE:** I will. But also to, this living away from home allowance, you know, in order to receive that. I mean country kids have the same possibilities as the Melbourne children, you know they all seem to earn the same amount. I think there should be some sort of leeway with kids who want to relocate or have to relocate that they have some sort of concession about earning that amount of money before they start studying. Because that's just not possible for a lot of families to actually finance these students to study outside their home areas, and you know, if there's no option, there's no option.

**JULIA GILLARD:** I'm trying to get more support into low and middle income families. That's what

this reform is all about. It's a reform that comes with start-up scholarships for students, I want to pay those start-up scholarships at the start of this university year – \$2,254 into the hands of students. I want a pay relocation scholarships for country kids who need to move – \$4,000, and the reason I can't do it is because I can't get the legislation through with the current attitude of the Liberal Party.

**BERNADETTE:** Well, thank you for trying. Please keep trying.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Thank you.

**JON FAINE:** Good on you, Bernadette. Thank you for your call. If you want more money for those sorts of things, why do you keep giving so many millions of dollars to some of the wealthiest private schools in the country when they clearly don't need it?

**JULIA GILLARD:** Jon, I think you're not doing apples to apples comparison here. What we're trying to do with student income support is use every dollar better so that the money goes to the people who need it the most. What we're doing with schools is we've almost doubled the amount going into school education...

**JON FAINE:** Yes, but it's how it's being distributed I'm talking about.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Yes, and let me talk about how it's being distributed. We said when we came to government that we would keep the SES funding model for this four years and review it...

**JON FAINE:** Why? Why did you decide to do that?

**JULIA GILLARD:** To give schools certainty because the election was in 2007 and the new funding quadrennium was going to start in 2009. Schools plan on a long lead time...

**JON FAINE:** (inaudible)

**JULIA GILLARD:** And they needed to know how much money they were going to get. But, Jon, in government we have built on that. \$1.5 billion, new money for disadvantaged schools...

**JON FAINE:** Yeah, but according to the Senate...

**JULIA GILLARD:** More than half a billion dollars for teacher quality...

**JON FAINE:** Your answer to Bernadette a moment ago was about trying to target the money to the people who need it the most.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Yes and that's what one \$1.5 billion for disadvantaged schools is about.

**JON FAINE:** This is clearly not what you're doing with school funding with the most expensive private schools which are themselves putting fees up to the disadvantage of some families, but those schools using taxpayers' money for rowing sheds, swimming pools and all sorts of other luxury facilities, whilst other schools are trying to get the basics. If you're talking about equity and distribution, why aren't you doing it there?

**JULIA GILLARD:** OK, Jon, can we just get a few facts into this debate. The AEU that's been criticising me a little bit over the last week, the AEU published a funding report which showed the growth in the amount of money that we are putting into government schools, for example; the AEU has said there has been movement, we are investing more money, we're investing more money in

disadvantaged schools, we're investing more money in teacher quality, we're investing more money in literacy and numeracy. These are measures that will make a difference in the schools that need that helping hand the most. We gave a promise in the election campaign about maintaining the SES funding model for this quadrennium. We've honoured that promise. That was the right thing to do.

**JON FAINE:** Are you going to review it after the next federal election this year?

**JULIA GILLARD:** We gave a commitment in the 2007 election that we would have a funding review before the school funding that starts in 2013. So there's plenty of time to have that review, Jon.

**JON FAINE:** Celia in the city before we run out of time, just three minutes till the latest ABC news coming up at 10 o'clock. Celia, good morning

**CELIA:** Hi Jon, hi Julia. Just very quickly, I've had the very good fortune to have a very charming, delightful young Indian guy come in. He's a very skilled machinist and makes magnificent shirts. I would love to employ him full time, I can't because he doesn't have a working visa yet, I would love to sponsor him but as a small business it's made impossible for me because I would have to take another person on to be actually able to employ him and sponsor him. Is there anything you can do for small business to actually enable us to use the skills and work with these guys because they are fantastic?

**JULIA GILLARD:** Well I assume the person you're employing is an Indian student and so if you have a student visa in this country you're here for the purpose of education and there's a limit on the number of hours that you can work. In terms of sponsoring someone, a skilled worker to migrate to this country; my understanding is that the biggest users of our skilled migration system, one of the elements of it are small businesses. So there is a way for small businesses to engage in that and you should be able to get some advice from the Immigration Department about that.

**CELIA:** I have tried that but it is extremely difficult for us because we have to employ more people to actually be able to take that guy on.

**JON FAINE:** And Celia, I think, you've got the Deputy Prime Minister, but the Minister for Immigration, I suppose, Julia Gillard is the appropriate place for you to do that. Now, I have to apologise to you because you've been trying to concentrate whilst being distracted by...

**RED SIMONS:** I haven't done anything yet. I haven't done a thing.

**JON FAINE:** You walked in, that's enough. Red Simons happy new year.

**RED SIMONS:** I did lean into your shot trying to get onto the television camera. I hope I did.

**JON FAINE:** To no effect or impact I might add. Happy new year.

**RED SIMONS:** Same to you.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Happy new year, Red.

**RED SIMONS:** You too.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Be glad to have you back, are you starting next week?

**RED SIMONS:** I am starting next week.

**JON FAINE:** As if they haven't suffered enough.

**JULIA GILLARD:** Jon, we like Red. I'm on his side.

**JON FAINE:** Are you? Do you want to stay on for the rap?

Julia Gillard, thank you for joining us this morning The Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, and Red Simons continuing with the rap after the news.