chunk of the telecommunications sector via the National Broadband Network, the available data suggests that the effects of privatisations during the 1980s and 1990s on Commonwealth government employment has not been reversed to date.

Apart from the direct dependence of those on the government payroll on the state, the Commonwealth government actively transfers financial resources to individuals through a rapidly expanding welfare state. This is in spite of a jump in the level of national income per Australian man, woman and child from $30,496 over the life of the Whitlam government to $57,874 under the Gillard government.

Official data shows that the number of people receiving cash benefits increased from 1.2 million people in 1970, prior to the election of Gough Whitlam, to 1.9 million in 1975, his final year in office.

Since that time the number of Australians receiving cash benefits from the Commonwealth has risen to almost five million Australians in 2010, with increases in disability support pensions, the unemployed and those receiving parenting and carer payments driving much of the observed growth over time.

As a share of the total population this increase in welfare dependency has been dramatic—from 9.1 per cent in 1970 to 13.7 per cent in 1975, and further to 22.1 per cent in 2010. The Gillard government’s proposal to compensate, and in some instances overcompensate, households for the effects of a carbon tax will only serve to entrench a new form of (carbon) welfare dependency.

The Gillard government has embarked on an ambitious project of social engineering that would have been unforeseeable in the days of Gough Whitlam. Nanny-state policies to control what Australians drink, eat and inhale have exploded and include regressive taxes, draconian regulations and a myriad of other state-directed ‘nudges’ to control our every vice.

In just one example of the public policy failure associated with this approach, an ‘alcopops tax’ on sugary alcoholic drinks succeeded in slowing sales of popular brands of beverage among young drinkers, but not without leading to record-busting sales of hip flasks and hard liquor, as young people opted to mix their own cocktails instead of buying them ready-made.

One of the defining features of the Whitlam era was the hostility between the business community and the government. The high profile public policy failures of the current government are contributing to what many see as the worst relations with the business community in a generation.

Even Alan Kohler, the ABC financial commentator (and a supporter of the carbon tax), has observed that ‘business people generally are more at odds with the government than at any time since the Whitlam years.’

Many business leaders are now speaking out, including the Westpac and BHP Billiton board member Lindsay Maxsted, who has said that relations with business under Gillard are ‘probably the most difficult relationship I’ve seen.’

So, is Gillard worse than Whitlam?

It might be possible to throw up other statistical indicators to portray Gillard in a better light than presented here. Some might even go so far as to say that many of the poor economic and fiscal outcomes under the prime minister’s watch are ‘not her fault.’

But her record as prime minister to date comes perilously close to Australia’s costly experiment with Whirlamism. Gough Whitlam may still pip Gillard in the eyes of many Australians as our worst prime minister. It is frightening, however, that a reasonable comparison can even be made. By every measure, the Gillard government should be much more competent than Whirlam’s.

Yet perhaps the most damning critique is to identify, as many are now doing, the yawning gap between the policy competence and vision of the Hawke Labor era and modern Labor. With its enthusiasm for state-control and activity, Gillard and her government are departing from the reformist tendencies of the 1980s ALP.

And who knows, given enough time, Gillard may yet claim the mantle from Whitlam in her own right.

“The numbers of people receiving cash benefits increased from 1.2 million people in 1970 to almost five million Australians in 2010.”

ianopolitical consultant and a former president of the Australian Liberal Student Federation.

Technology may help end wasteful government spending, says Tim Andrews.

In recent years, Australian politics has been dominated by calls for greater transparency and accountability. Advances in online technology such as the rise of social networking and ‘web 2.0’ allows citizens to interact with the government in unprecedented ways.

Buzzwords abound, and the Australian Government 2.0 Taskforce released a report in 2009, amid much fanfare, heralding a new era of ‘open government’.

Yet in this apparent era of transparency and accountability, behind the façade of politicians tweeting and having a Facebook page, not much has changed. Crucially, the finances of the Australian government remain shrouded in mystery, away from the scrutiny of the general public.

The Australian taxpayer continues to be prevented from knowing exactly what the government does with their tax dollars. The information that exists is hidden from public view in lengthy reports, and behind cumbersome regulations. Often the only way to know about spending is through Freedom of Information requests.

The Australian taxpayer continues to be prevented from knowing exactly what the government does with their tax dollars. The information that exists is hidden from public view in lengthy reports, and behind cumbersome regulations. Often the only way to know about spending is through Freedom of Information requests.

The Australian taxpayer continues to be prevented from knowing exactly what the government does with their tax dollars. The information that exists is hidden from public view in lengthy reports, and behind cumbersome regulations. Often the only way to know about spending is through Freedom of Information requests.
of Information requests—a costly and lengthy process for ordinary citizens. When reports do emerge of government mismanagement or malfeasance, whether it be the funneling of money to special interest groups, cronyism, or downright fraud, the process for ordinary citizens. Indeed, the ability of citizens to hold government accountable is not possible. Without transparency, governments can be thwarted from funneling money to special interest groups or pork-barrelling to marginal projects that can not withstand such scrutiny could be cancelled. It would be a lot more difficult to justify rots and junkets once such expenditure becomes public knowledge.

The rationale for such a website, governments shall no longer be able to hide waste away from the public eye. Rather, they will be forced to become accountable. Inefficient projects that can not withstand such scrutiny could be cancelled. It would be a lot more difficult to justify rots and junkets once such expenditure becomes public knowledge.

Thirdly, as many Freedom of Information requests involve financial information, and compliance with this is not only a lengthy process, but requires considerable expense and staff time to process, by providing such information online, FOI requests can be reduced, generating further savings. Perhaps more fundamentally, however, to those of us who believe in smaller government and re-

empowering the individual, by demonstrating to the public just how much of their hard-earned tax dollars are wasted, significant pressure will be put to cut the size and scope of government. How many projects and grants do you really think would stand up to such public exposure? Of course, the argument works both ways. If you believe in big government, then this is your perfect opportunity to prove to the public that their tax dollars are well spent, and big government is justified.

Naturally, inefficient governments are often loath to expose their inner workings to the public—secretly, after all, offers protection, and no doubt many will respond that such a portal is your perfect opportunity to prove to the public that their tax dollars are being used for the purchase of software, and the website was built and loaded by reallocating staff time at no extra cost.

Ultimately, this is not a partisan issue. Irrespective of where you sit on the political spectrum, transparency is something everyone agrees is good. The initial legislation in the US was co-sponsored by John McCain and then Senator Barack Obama. As Grover Norquist, President of Americans for Tax Reform, has said, ‘This is not a left-right issue, it is a right-wrong issue’. The only people who oppose transparency are those who have a vested interest in keeping the status quo of secrecy and waste alive.

Transparency websites have been tried, tested, and proven. ‘They have been built cheaply, they have saved millions, and they have empowered ordinary taxpayers to engage with their government, and to know how their taxes are being spent. They eliminate waste, help stop corruption and prevent fraud, and there is no strong political, economic, or legal argument against them. By allowing public scrutiny of government spending, governments can be thwarted from funneling money to special interest groups