

Anika Wells' biggest roort is not flights, it's taking out more than two hundred post offices

Communications Minister Anika Wells is justifiably being pilloried by the opposition and in the media for her travel expenses, but her greatest public policy failure has barely raised eyebrows.

Under her and her predecessor Michelle Rowland's watch, Australia Post CEO Paul Graham has axed 202 post offices, with promises of even more closures to come. The tens of millions of dollars in job losses, business and productivity losses pales in comparison to the thousands of dollars of her travel expenses.

Says Robbie Barwick, National Chairman of the Australian Citizens Party, "Minister Anika Wells has enabled Paul Graham and his team of ex-McDonalds and Dominos executives.

"They have devastated hundreds of communities that have lost post offices, and their stated plan is to devastate a hundred more."

Along with her predecessor Michelle Rowland, Wells has said and done nothing to address community concerns. She has, however, handsomely rewarded Graham and his executive team at Australia Post with massive bonuses of between \$600,000 and \$1.6 million, making them the highest paid cohort of public employees in Australia.

Says Barwick, "Wells' greenlighting of the decimation of local postal services fails the pub test. Just as importantly she is completely tone deaf to community needs.

"Tens of thousands of ordinary Australians have signed petitions, telephoned her office and written directly to her and other government members. Along with a sustained campaign in support of local communities from the Citizens Party, their concerns have been ignored."

Labor MPs, such as Member for Wills in Melbourne Peter Khalil, and the Member for Banks in Sydney Zhi Soon, have made speeches in parliament about the devastation of their communities losing post offices, only to be ignored by their own party.

The Labor government inherited an appalling management and oversight culture at Australia Post from the previous Morrison government but, rather than take care of the communities that elected them, it's been business as usual for the new Australia Post regime.

The LNP government started the rot at Australia Post by forcing out then-CEO Christine Holgate for spending \$20,000 on watches for executives who helped her to save post offices. A subsequent Senate inquiry found no wrongdoing on Holgate's part.

At the time, the communications minister was Paul Fletcher, who'd been a senior adviser to the communications minister in the Howard LNP government. He left via the

notorious “revolving door” to become chief government lobbyist for Optus—a company regulated by the portfolio he had just left—before entering parliament and becoming communications minister in 2019.

Rather than admit their mistake, Fletcher and Prime Minister Scott Morrison ushered in Paul Graham to the top job at Australia Post.

Says Barwick, “Christine Holgate was forced out for rewarding her executive team for expanding and increasing revenue from Bank@Post services. Paul Graham was brought in to get rid of services and has been obscenely rewarded for his efforts.

“There were 4,320 post offices nationwide when he took up the reins, now there are 4,118 and his stated priority is for more than one hundred of the existing post offices to be shut down; Anika Wells is the enabler of all of this.

“Taking expensive trips is part and parcel of being a government minister. While criticism is well deserved, there is some justification for expenses accrued within ministerial guidelines.

“There is no justification for the way she continues to rob local communities of vital services.”