



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Schools

SPEECH

Wednesday, 30 November 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker	Perrett, Graham, MP	Question No.	

Mr PERRETT (Moreton—Opposition Whip) (16:09): I was 19 years old when I finished my teaching degree and went off to teach in country Queensland. In fact, I know how long 19 years is because 19 years ago today I finished my last day of teaching. The reason I give that as an example is that it takes a long time to change an education system—nearly 20 years, especially when you are changing a fundamental funding model, which is what Labor put into place and what the Australian people thought they were getting when they voted for the Abbott government back in 2013. I could use some props to illustrate it but perhaps will not in the current climate. The Australian people thought there was a unity ticket on Gonski.

We heard the member for Mitchell saying we are spending record amounts on funding education. I just want to put a fact out there. Nineteen years ago, when I left teaching, there were fewer children in our schools. We are a growing country. Every year, there are more schoolkids in our schools. Lo and behold, that means we need more teachers in our schools and so our budget increases. So it is a misdirection to say that we are spending record amounts on education, because it is not the Gonski model. The Gonski model was all about focusing on kids with low socioeconomic status, Indigenous students and people who live in rural and remote areas. I stress that to the Nats because you have been sold a pup. The Nats way back under Whitlam, in the seventies, understood that funding going into the bush schools can make a significant difference. Adrian Piccoli in the New South Wales parliament understood what this delivered for the bush, either for Indigenous kids or in rural and remote areas. Education funding does cost a lot, but, as Gonski and his expert panel illustrated, this is actually an economic reform. It is not just a group of teachers getting around saying, 'We need to do this;' this is actually an economic model. Why? As the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study report and many other reports show, we need to perform better. How do you do that? You invest in schools.

I was waiting for the member for Mitchell in his interrupted 10-minute speech to give some examples from the schools in his electorate as to why the Gonski money is not needed. In fact, I am waiting for anyone opposite to give me concrete examples from their schools as to why the Gonski money is not doing good things in their schools. I can tell you: all 50-odd schools that I am associated with in Moreton, either on the border or inside the electorate, can give me concrete examples of how they are using the Gonski money. I spoke to Dr Greg Nelson from Sherwood State School this morning because there was a school assembly there and he wanted to have a yarn to me about Gonski funding. This is a high-performing school. He said that the school pumps the funding into targeted writing projects, especially for boys. They can finesse it that much at a school level. In science and maths, they are putting money to target boys' writing, something that the member for Lalor, if she was here, would appreciate as a school teacher as well. At Corinda State School, the principal indicated that they are supporting teachers by ensuring that they have ongoing refinement of instructional design and delivery. School communities know how to spend this money and school communities know how to get results. But the government have ripped \$30 billion out of this program, when you gave a solemn promise to the people of Australia that there was a unity ticket.

We know it will take time to move the ship of education in a different, better direction, but we need to do it for economic reasons. Do you think the schools in Singapore are sitting around saying, 'You don't need to work hard'? Do you think the schools in Vietnam or China or Taiwan—our neighbours, whom we are competing with—are saying, 'You don't need to invest in education'? This is about improving productivity. This is about improving the economic chances for my grandchildren. This is why the Gonski promise should be honoured, because it will result in better outcomes for the economy down the track. We know that. Gonski, remember, was a banker. He was someone who understood productivity, not someone who was an educational expert, but by the end of it, when he looked at it, he understood that that is where we should be investing our money. I hope that those opposite remember that, particularly the Nationals, rather than betraying the bush, which is what you are doing by backing away from Gonski funding.