



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Education

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (15:46): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance because it is it is on something very close to my heart: education. I started teaching about 30 years ago.

Mr McCormack interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: I will take that interjection. I was not 15; I had just turned 20. In fact, back then, there were Gestetners, chalk and the teacher was the holder of all the knowledge; effectively they were a sage on the stage. You taught geography by drawing maps on the board. There has been something called the information revolution since then. Now if I talk about geography or a place in the world, my seven-year-old can take me on his iPad to that spot and show me a Google streetscape of Keppel Bay, so things have changed. We are no longer the sage on the stage because, in this age of technology, the teacher is more of a guide on the side, helping people through.

If we look at technology, the digital revolution is the greatest potential boost to productivity since Gutenberg developed the printing press, I would suggest. Putting aside cat videos and some of those other things, the digital revolution will change and transform so many of our occupations and how we approach knowledge including education.

Ms Butler interjecting—

Mr PERRETT: I have nothing against cat videos, member for Griffith. However, productivity is the most important judge as to whether or not an economy is humming along.

When Labor came to office on 24 November 2007, productivity was measured at zero. In fact, when you look at productivity—I know it is a little bit volatile as a figure—there has not been the heavy lifting needed for about 20 or 30 years. Sure, if you want to sell off assets and if you have got money pouring into Treasury coffers because of the high cost of coking coal and iron ore, you can use that money to give tax cuts—tax cuts that Labor copied which, as a marginal seat holder at the time, I was not against—but in hindsight those tax cuts were perhaps not the wisest thing for boosting productivity and looking after the country's future. Middle-class welfare like the baby bonus showed that the Howard government was the most profligate government in the history of Australia—the IMF said that. Those opposite did not boost productive infrastructure; instead, they wasted that money.

What did Labor do? We understood that technology would be the productivity boost for the future. We invested in the NBN. Those opposite said they agreed with this. The shadow communications minister at the time, Mr Turnbull, the member for Wentworth, said, 'Yes we agree; productivity will be boosted by the NBN.' But what have we seen under him? Since the Prime Minister was instructed by the former Prime Minister—before he was knifed—we have seen the cost of the NBN double. They have doubled the rollout time and they have halved the internet speed. This is under the former communications minister and now Prime Minister, who I think actually invented the internet.

Labor has a fair dinkum policy. We believe in a fair dinkum NBN because that would be not only a boost for education but also a boost for productivity on the farms, in schools, in defence, in all sorts of areas. I saw that the white paper today talked about the boost that will flow from investing in technology and manufacturing.

Also, we believe in Gonski education funding. So Labor's 'Your Child. Our Future' plan, like Gonski the banker recommended, will focus on every child's needs. It will be great for the country and for the National Party. People like New South Wales education minister Piccoli got it. He got it up front. I notice the minister opposite, the Assistant Minister for Defence, is quiet on this because he gets the bush. As the Nationals have always understood—going back to Black Jack McEwen and a few other people—Labor's education policies are great for the bush. And coming from the bush myself, I know that Australia's best and brightest—be they Indigenous, be they from rural and remote areas—need to have a chance. That is the best investment. So we have gone from Gonski unity before the election to now, where we do not have unity. We just have unicorns and nothing else. It is disgraceful.