



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE  
RELATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
(WELFARE TO WORK AND VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION SERVICES) BILL 2006**

**Consideration in Detail**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 26 February 2007**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 26 February 2007  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Gillard, Julia, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms GILLARD** (Lalor) (6.02 pm)—If that is the minister when she is clarifying, I would hate to see her when she is obfuscating. I ask the Minister for Workforce Participation to answer the following questions about this measure which are dealt with in Labor's amendments. Firstly, can the minister explain the government's rationale for removing access to the pensioner education supplement for the group that I have identified? Secondly, why has the government abandoned its commitment to provide the pensioner education supplement to all Welfare to Work candidates for the duration of their course if they began receiving the pensioner education supplement before they moved from a pension to an allowance? When did the government decide that this particular group, who have been moved off the disability support pension after a second or subsequent review, should be singled out?

We believe that we are entitled to know—and indeed the Australian people are entitled to know—how this measure is consistent with the skilling of our workforce to meet current and future labour requirements and with the stated objective of the pensioner education supplement which, according to Centrelink, is supposed 'to assist people with study to increase their chances of finding work'. That is the stated objective of the pensioner education supplement. How is the measure in this bill, which is removing access to it for a defined group, consistent with that aim? What evidence does the Howard government have that restricting access to the pensioner education supplement for these people will improve their chance of getting a job?

Why are people with a disability being penalised by the Howard government? What other measures will be available to these people to help them meet the ongoing costs of their education? How much is the government going to save through this measure?

**Dr Emerson**—Good question.

**Ms GILLARD**—I am being assured by the member for Rankin that that is a good question—a question about the money. How much is being saved through this measure? Has any analysis been undertaken to establish the costs to current pensioner education support recipients and the likelihood of those in this cohort dropping out of their courses due to losing the pensioner education supplement? Wouldn't that be a track record to be proud of as a government—causing people to drop out of their courses due to costs! Where this payment would assist disabled recipients with the costs of attending real training or education courses, what other measures or programs will be available to them to assist with these costs? It is not my intention to delay the House on this matter, but it is my intention to say that the opposition is seriously seeking answers to these questions, which ought to be available to the House before the House votes on the amendments standing in my name.