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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

**HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT
AMENDMENT BILL 2009**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 16 September 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker Neumann, Shayne, MP	Question No.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11.52 am)—I rise to speak in support of the Higher Education Support Amendment Bill 2009. This is an important piece of legislation. It is important because it is part of the Rudd government's commitment to higher education reform. It is important because higher education is crucial to ensuring that we are the most productive in terms of our workforce, that we have profitable business and that our people achieve everything that they aspire to in life. Where a person lives or the disadvantages they suffer should not determine the destiny of their vocation or income security for them and their families in the long term. Providing assistance to tertiary students, whether through VET courses or through universities, is absolutely vital in the circumstances.

Whilst on the face of it the bill is not particularly far reaching—it is not a long bill; it is short in the circumstances—it does ensure that assistance in terms of FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP can be made available to full fee-paying students studying in higher level education or training, in providing loans for all or part of the student's tuition costs and in ensuring that students who are attending certain educational institutions can get access to tuition assistance. It also allows institutions to have more flexibility in fulfilling the requirements for tuition assurance arrangements. Currently they have to either be exempt or indeed have those in place at the time of an application. This extends out the time for that institution to get that assurance to the time that a minister might approve it. That is more flexible in terms of its arrangements, but it opens up the prospects of students getting access to additional educational institutions.

This is extremely important for my constituents in Blair. Getting help to go to university is crucial for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds whose parents cannot support them. Many people in this House will have received assistance through Austudy or TEAS or through assistance from family or friends to get to university. It is crucial that we provide more assistance to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds because, if we say we are a strong country, we need also to say that we are a fair country. The ethos of being a country that believes in a fair go is crucial.

Whilst the amendments streamline the application and assessment processes for higher education and training organisations to apply for FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP for assistance to students, they are also important amendments because they broaden out the opportunities for students to get assistance and access to educational institutions, which might help them to get the kinds of qualifications in life that will improve their financial circumstances. This in turn will ensure that their families in the future will get access to a decent wage and salary and will be able to meet all the necessities of life as well as have that little bit extra for their recreation, lifestyle and pleasure. The bill amends tuition assurance provisions and it removes the administrative requirement for higher education and training organisations to have those arrangements in place.

There are a number of amendments in this bill and I want to commend the member for Shortland, who almost painstakingly went through the provisions—and I do not intend to go through them. This is also a great opportunity to commend a number of local providers in my electorate, who are providers of higher education in an area that, historically, is not necessarily an area where a lot of people enter tertiary institutions. I went to Bundamba State Secondary College, and the records that I have looked at said that I was the first person ever from that school to go on to study law at university. It is not common enough for students who have attended state high schools to go on to university. We want to make sure that they get every opportunity to go to universities or TAFE institutions.

I want to take this opportunity to also commend the Bremer Institute of TAFE in my electorate for their careers day, where young people from local high schools got the opportunity to access the kind of financial help we are talking about in this bill. It also provided information to get them to TAFE or to university. Getting that knowledge and that information to young people is extremely important. It was an important careers day because it allowed students to get varied information. They heard from people at the Springfield Land Corporation and from people at Ipswich City Council. Even hearing from their local federal member was important for them to understand what opportunities lay before them. Bremer Institute of TAFE has been around for many decades in

Ipswich. It had its genesis in the centre of town, has been located in a number of different places and is now in Bundamba. The Bremer Institute of TAFE is an important institution in Ipswich and it is important that students in the area get the kind of higher education support that this bill will provide.

I want to also commend the University of Queensland, Ipswich campus, for their recent publication. I was pleased to be there at the UQ Boilerhouse launch of *Mines, mills and shopping malls: celebrating the identity of Ipswich*. At the risk of incurring the wrath of a certain member from New South Wales, I will say it is a wonderful book. Higher education is important to the city of Ipswich, and this legislation is as well. This book talks about the impact of certain events on Ipswich—the Reids fire, the 1974 floods and the Box Flat Mine disaster. It is an important publication by a higher education institution that operates in my electorate with the support of the federal government. The budget that gave out \$2.4 million over four years to ensure that an additional 50,000 students can attend university by 2013 was so important.

This legislation today is important to ensure that we give assistance to full-fee-paying students. Getting those students through university and TAFE is crucial. In my electorate we have seen unemployment go down by three per cent in the last 12 months or so. Jobs have risen by 10 per cent. We want to make sure that those jobs are good jobs. We want to make sure that those kids get the opportunity to become carpenters, plumbers, tradesmen and hairdressers and work in banking and finance.

Legislation that streamlines application procedures, legislation that improves the approval processes and legislation that makes our higher education sector function better, as this legislation does, improves the chances and the lot of young Ipswich students and students in the rural areas outside Ipswich. That is why I am very happy to support this legislation. This is good legislation. It is reforming legislation. I commend the minister for bringing it to the House. I am very pleased to support it.