



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Petition: National School Chaplaincy Program

SPEECH

Thursday, 26 November 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 26 November 2009	Source House
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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Dutton, Peter, MP	Question No.

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (9.41 am)—I take this opportunity to place on the record the disappointment of the constituents of the Dickson electorate with the Rudd government's refusal to provide them with certainty as to the future funding of the National School Chaplaincy Program. After some pressure the Rudd government made this week a temporary extension to the program at a reduced funding level until the end of 2011, after which time there may be no more funding despite the program's social benefits, sound administration and strong community support. Malcolm Turnbull announced last Friday that the coalition, if elected, would continue funding for the program in its current form at its current level of \$165 million over three years. We call on the Rudd Labor government to do the same.

That fact that I have with me this morning a petition approved by the Standing Committee on Petitions with 1,114 signatures collected from concerned constituents of Dickson over a 10-day period—with hundreds more signatures received this week which I will table in due course—shows the genuine concern arising when families are told that the funding for their local chappie may not continue. I table the petition with 1,114 signatures.

The petition read as follows—

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the Rudd Government's failure to commit to ongoing funding for the National School Chaplaincy program beyond mid 2010.

Figures show that 97% of school principals who have engaged a chaplain strongly support the program and recognise the benefits for their school communities. If Federal funding is discontinued, many chaplaincy services will have to cease operating. This will have an incredibly negative impact on our children in schools who are looking for that independent, trusted friend who can help them navigate through life's issues.

We ask the house to recognise the importance of the National School Chaplaincy Program and intervene to put pressure on the Federal Government to continue support and provide funding for this vital program.

from 1,114 citizens

Petition received.

Mr DUTTON—Having been part of the effort to initiate the National School Chaplaincy Program under Prime Minister John Howard, I have been a strong supporter of the program and its benefits throughout my electorate. I understand and recognise the importance of and the valuable role that the chaplains play and I have attended many fundraising dinners, a cappuccino day, morning teas and committee meetings where I have heard many success stories from school principals and teachers who acknowledge and agree that the chaplains support not only students but in turn their families and local communities by offering pastoral care and guidance across religious denominations and beliefs. I quote one of my constituents:

The children of today are faced with so many issues and a lot of them have no support and no-one to turn to for encouragement to be a role model for them.

School chaplains, I believe, have filled this void. I commend this petition to the House. I support all of those who have instigated and supported this petition. (*Time expired*)